

**PRESERVATION AND RECLAMATION OF YOUNG ADULTS  
BY THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH**

**A Professional Project  
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the Faculty of the  
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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry**

**by  
Jerome Ellington Brown**

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## ABSTRACT

### Preservation and Reclamation of Young Adults by the African American Church

by

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This project is designed to investigate and assess the presence and absence of young adults in the contemporary African American Church. The ultimate objective is to develop strategies to retain young adults in the "fold" and attract young adults who are outside of the church.

There are two assumptions involved in this project:

(1) statistics show a decline in young adult attendance statistics over the last two decades; and (2) the overall African American Church has been weakened by this loss. It is a supplementary assumption that young adults face personal crises connected with the transitional cycles that occur during this period.

A course of action for the church and church leaders is formulated from this project's research. It integrates and outlines biblical and theological bases that make action imperative. Methodology involves interviews with various church leaders to ascertain successful programs. Views and

opinions of young adults "in" as well as "out" of the church are also utilized to discover what causes departure. Conversely, information garnered also highlights activities that serve to preserve and nurture young adults in the church.

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1.	Introduction.....	1
	The Problem Addressed by This Project.....	1
	Importance of the Problem.....	4
	Thesis.....	6
	Work Previously Done in the Field.....	7
	Scope and Limitation of the Project.....	13
	Literary Review.....	13
	Procedures for Integration.....	14
	Chapter Outlines.....	16
2.	Issues.....	19
	Components of Young Adulthood.....	23
	Neo-Social Deterrents.....	29
	Ethical Considerations.....	42
3.	Demographics.....	45
4.	Young Adulthood: Confidence and Crisis.....	51
	The Confidence.....	51
	The Crisis.....	61
5.	Theological Affinity.....	78
	Lost Sheep, Lost Coin.....	78
	Theological Conceptualizations.....	84

6. Voices.....	90
Voices--Pastors and Church Leaders.....	91
Voices--Young Adults Who Remain in Church....	105
Voices--Young Adults Who Are Not in Church...	109
7. Conclusion.....	112
Assessment.....	112
Recommendations.....	119
Analysis.....	126

## Appendixes

A. Glossary.....	129
B. Questionnaire #1.....	133
C. Questionnaire #2.....	135
D. Questionnaire #3.....	137
Bibliography.....	139

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### The Problem Addressed by This Project

A startling dilemma has surfaced in American society in recent years. Glaring absences in church attendance and membership by young adults in the American church in proportion to other age groups has become problematic. Since 1965, seventy-five per cent of all Americans feel that religion has lost its influence. This conclusion is the result of research completed in 1990 by Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan.<sup>1</sup> This situation, in the opinion of some persons, is especially true in the African American Church.<sup>2</sup> "Some survey responses reveal that studies of black church attendance have noted that the highest rates of (non-attending, non-affiliated) African Americans among northern, urban, young, less-educated people are black males."<sup>3</sup> Non-published, but recognized data also disclose that absences of young

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<sup>1</sup>Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan, *Religion in America*, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 390-91.

<sup>2</sup>This conclusion is taken from surveys conducted by this writer in conjunction with research for this project.

<sup>3</sup>Robert M. Franklin, *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 76.



females from the African American Church also has increased.

The apparent lack of concern and/or active participation by at what appears to be a large portion of the African American Church in formulating solutions to counteract the increasing departure of young adults from church structures and activities has heightened the problem.

One possible reason for this situation (one of the assumptions of this work) is that the psychological impact of exiting one phase of life and the subsequent entrance into another phrase of life that requires more responsibility in some instances be a cause for severe problems. It is imperative that the African American Church be cognizant of this negative possibility, and prepare to initiate ministry strategies and mechanisms designed to confront such dilemmas. Any measure of success in such endeavors will ultimately benefit the involved individuals as well as the universal church community.

The problems faced by individuals making transitions at what is regarded as the "extremes" of existence are presently, in most instances, adequately addressed. Problems encountered by those groups are the focus of

many social agencies. There are avenues of assistance available in the secular sector, as well as in church structures for those making the transition from childhood to puberty and from puberty to adolescence. There are also very effective strategies devised to assist in the final aging processes. What seems to be woefully lacking, in the secular sector, as well as in the collective church, are sensibilities, adequate concern, and programs of assistance for young adult transitional problems.

I will demonstrate that biblical directives make it imperative, due to the heightened departure from the church by young adults, that the African American Church investigate and institute measures to preserve and reclaim this precious human resource.

This work will focus on the situations and dilemmas facing adolescents' ascendance into adulthood. At this particular time of life there is the propensity for indecision, trepidation, and anxiety. Statistics illustrate that there is a decline in overall church attendance and membership in American religion. Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen shed light on the fact that declines in attendance between the ages of eighteen and

thirty are universal throughout church communities.<sup>4</sup> Evidence of this trend is especially apparent in the African American church. In recent years, due to various social or personal stimuli (such as failure in relationships, employment failure, or emotional crises), the dropout rate from church activity among American young adults has accelerated markedly. This conclusion is the result of research done by Robert T. Gribbon.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, from evangelistic (spiritual) as well as temporal perspectives, the need to attract and retain these valuable resources is a top priority. Reclamation of those who have departed, plus preservation of those who are on the path to departure are this work's overarching objectives.

#### Importance of the Problem

From this dilemma spring the many problems this project addresses. Society as a whole, and the African American church in particular, experience a loss of collective productivity and attendance as individuals progress through this transitional stage. At ages

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<sup>4</sup>Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, "Research on Factors Influencing Church Commitment," in *Understanding Church Growth and Decline, 1950-1978*, eds. Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 42-48.

<sup>5</sup>Robert T. Gribbon, *Developing Faith in Young Adults: Effective Ministry with 18-35 Year Olds* (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1990), 38.

approximately between eighteen and twenty-two, attendance and participation in the church and in church related programs drastically decreases. Portions of this age group rebel against and reject religious and spiritual values. "Grow up," is signaled explicitly and implicitly by the culture and significant others to those who comprise this age group. They now find themselves at that long awaited juncture. With increased amounts of independence, accentuated by exposure to new educational horizons, "growing up" often equates to "dropping out." The "dropout" phenomenon from church and religious affiliation often becomes irreversible for many former African American young adult churchgoers. Also relevant is the fact that ever-increasing numbers of African Americans have not been previously exposed to, or are not currently involved in, religious activities equal to that of their predecessors. Important ecclesial efforts needed include "safekeeping" of those who remain within the church, "retrieval" of those who have left, and even evangelistic "collections" of those who never belonged. It is important that efforts are made to uncover and analyze how the African American community as a whole perceives the current level of participation of young adults in the composite church. What are the prevailing

beliefs on this issue? Some individuals feel that departures from the African American Church by young adults have become recognized in recent years as the norm.<sup>6</sup> What is the "feel" of the community? Has change occurred in communal ethos in relationship to overall church membership, and specifically to young adult church membership? These are driving forces behind this inquiry.

To these ends, the following investigative tools will be implemented: sampling of opinions of those involved; surveys conducted in Los Angeles California and the surrounding regions on three levels:

1. Interviews with pastors/church leaders from various African American religious denominations
2. Interviews with African American young adults (ages 18-30) who are active participants in the African American Church
3. Interviews with African American young adults who are not active participants in the African American Church

From the collected data, it is hoped that conclusions and insights will lead to possible solutions for the dilemma.

### Thesis

Some factions of the African American Church are devoid of effective ministries to counteract the loss of

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 5.

young adults. Young adult presence is important to the church now, and is absolutely essential for future success and growth. I will demonstrate that biblical directives make it imperative that the African American Church investigates and institutes measures to preserve and reclaim this precious human resource.

#### Work Previously Done in the Field

Authors such as Naomi Golan study the transitions and problems faced by African American young adults. In chapters four and five of *Passing Through Transitions*, Golan uncovers significant information on the issue. She identifies three different areas of importance: (1) leaving the pre-adult world and entering into career choices and changes are critical times for young adults; (2) negative effects caused by ethnic, gender, and class discrimination; and (3) personal situations such as intimacy, engagements, honeymoon, the advent of marriage, and "couplehood" without marriage.<sup>7</sup>

Sharon Parks offers a challenging theological perspective relating to the dimensions of transition during this time of life. In *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By*, Parks

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<sup>7</sup>Naomi Golan, *Passing through Transitions: A Guide for Practitioners* (New York: Free Press, 1981), 49-50.

documents the various problems that make the "attainment" of adulthood elusive. She defines the meaning of the activity of faith, offers developmental theories, and introduces interesting models for faithful life. She sees young adulthood as being wrought with promise as well as vulnerability. The imaginative world of this age group includes the momentous and often arduous quest for higher education. Parks also discusses the role of life as a "tutor," a conditioner, and mentor. Included is the concept of the person as an individual, and yet at the same time "embeddual." We are embedded in our perceptions until we can distinguish between our perception of the "other" and of the "other" itself. According to this principle, mature adulthood begins with an evolution from "I am my relationships" to "I have relationships."<sup>8</sup> The church can be instrumental in the successful completion of this transition in its young adult population.

Solutions available to the church, which are specifically aimed at the African American young adult are the concern of Carl S. Dudley. In an article in

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<sup>8</sup>Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult's Search for a Faith to Live By* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 245.

*Christian Ministry*, entitled "Young Adult Power," Dudley uses the example of a successful program in an unnamed metropolitan church. The Pastor allowed young adults themselves to generate programs of reclamation.<sup>9</sup>

The specific measure of success was the formation of planning seminars. Such endeavors allowed young adults to feel that the church cared about their concerns. The young adults in this faith community devised a "survey" that revealed views among young adults differed between male and female, as well as older and younger segments of young adulthood (but not between college and non-college representatives). All groups struggled with similar problems. Insights were gathered from various sources: their own experiences, classes, books, rap music, current movies, teachers, and parents. They discussed the stresses of college, jobs, dating, loneliness, sexual orientation, drug use, family, friends, things that bothered them most, and their hopes and dreams. Finally, they "rediscovered" the Bible--not as a rule book with simple answers, but as a resource that records the experiences of people like themselves who struggled with

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<sup>9</sup>Carl S. Dudley, "Young-Adult Power: In Afro-American Congregations," *Christian Ministry* 26 (March-April 1995): 38.



God in stories of their lives.<sup>10</sup>

Gwendolyn Rice addresses the issue in an article in *The Chicago Theological Register*. In "Young Black Men, The Church, and The Future," Rice eloquently details causes for the problem. She discovered that dilemmas besetting black men are in part the result of culture. She notes that in her native Mississippi, females far more often than males are sent away to college to become professionals. Traditionally, males in this milieu have stayed home to work in local industry or assist in farming endeavors. African American males have a history of assisting their biological sisters in getting through college.<sup>11</sup>

Rice also documents many instances of mothers on welfare who kept their sons home to baby sit, or were not equally concerned regarding educational expectations for female counterparts. In academic programs for adolescents, Rice reports that girls regularly outnumber boys, do better in their work, and stay committed longer. Rice worked in a residential behavioral program and

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>11</sup>Gwendolyn Rice, "Young Black Men, the Church, and Our Future," *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 78 (spring 1988): 10-15.

noticed that black males made up seventy-five per cent of the population. In her opinion, black males, with few exceptions, have difficulty growing up in our society.<sup>12</sup>

Rice also proposes a feasible, though complex plan for an active set of procedures offered to the African American Church to effectuate solutions. Among her proposals are:

1. Total church commitment and understanding of the problem
2. Strong athletic feeds into other activities
3. Sound tutoring programs
4. Long term involvement with youth to provide continuity
5. Instruction in areas where enduring values and trust are transmitted to include Bible study, studies of successful people, value clarification, black history, ethics, etc.
6. Outlets for hobbies, woodcraft, drama, music, etc.
7. Creation of opportunities for meaningful and challenging employment that supplements educational development and enhances self-esteem
8. Help in decision making, and how it impacts on future heterosexual relations, teen pregnancy<sup>13</sup>

In recent years, religious scholars have undertaken the issue in Doctor of Ministry dissertations, e. g., Marshall Truehill, *"Reclaiming Young Adult, Urban Black Males into the Life and Ministry Of Faith In Action"*

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 12.

*Baptist Church, New Orleans, Louisiana;*" John S. Fontaine, *"Young Adult Participation in the Afro-American Baptist Church in Richmond Virginia;"* and Tehran Frazier, *"Transforming Ministry with African American Inner City Youth."* All have literary works on the issue.<sup>14</sup>

Journal articles that relate to these issues include contributions by Vincent Harding, who reports the rapidly changing demographics of urban African Americans. According to Harding modern theologians must understand that ministry should reach African Americans and African American young adults in the city proper, and also in the suburbs. It is also stressed that the United States is no longer essentially "black" and "white,"; multi-culturalism is here, and ministry must take note of these factors.<sup>15</sup> Malcolm Boyd identifies young adults as having, among other traits, "wistful" dispositions. At

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<sup>14</sup>Marshall Truehill Jr. *"Reclaiming Young Adult, Urban Black Males into the Life and Ministry of Faith In Action Baptist Church, New Orleans, Louisiana,"* D Min. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990, 120; John S. Fontaine, *"Young Adult Participation in the Afro-American Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia,"* D Min. diss., Boston University School of Theology, 1993, 118-21; Tehran Frazier, *"Transforming Ministry with African American Inner City Youth,"* D Min. project, Claremont School of Theology, 1998.

<sup>15</sup>Vincent Harding, "Churchz N the Hood: The Shape of Urban Ministry toward the 21st Century." *Christianity and Crisis* 52, no. 16 (1992): 379-81.

this time of life there is a sense of both restlessness and melancholy. He offers a remedy for the dissatisfaction: renewed preaching of Jesus and the cross.<sup>16</sup>

### Scope and Limitation of the Project

The focus of this project is African American young adults in the inner city, because that is where my ministry lies. But the objective of this study does not exclude potential value and insight for other faith communities and ethnicities facing similar dilemmas.

My personal research has revealed that there is very limited published documentation relating to young adult church membership. Studies that are available are nearly 30 years old. The majority of materials available on the issue use figures compiled during the 1960s and 1970s

### Literary Review

It is the opinion of this writer, shaped through data gleaned in research for this work (also the failure to discover data) that the "sin" of omission characterizes the state of this issue for contemporary theologians.

My premise is that academic theologians appear to be

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<sup>16</sup>Malcolm Boyd, "The Wistful Generation: Reaching Young Adults Today: The Students and the Gospel," *Religion in Life* 31, no. 3 (summer 1962): 358-65.

focused on uncovering, investigating, and/or creating theologies. Much time and effort is extended to analyze, confirm, and dissect theological principles. In many instances, thought and subsequent actions associated with this issue are glossed over in favor of theory. Practical application or prolonged thought are not sufficiently applied to this dilemma. Simplistic endeavors, such as detailed surveys into membership loss, are not evident.

Theologians who are involved in active congregational ministry, because of necessity, appear to focus primarily on administrative, financial, and polity issues of the church. Sustained observation and authentication of the decline of young adults is denigrated because of more pressing matters.

These are the reasons, admittedly subjective, that help explain the substantial lack of recent overall young adult church membership documentation.

#### Procedures for Integration

The biblical principles that we are "all God's children," and that we are considered redeemable, are criterion and motivation embraced by this endeavor. In addition, the directive of mission/commission as codified in Matthew 28:19 demands that the church derive methods to "make disciples" of all nations. It is unique that

one of the present chores for the African American Church is to find the means whereby it can "make/remake" disciples within its own collective homes and families. Luke, chapter 15, provides paradigms that stress the necessity for concern and the recapture of the "lost." Verses 3-10 of this chapter present the parables of the "Lost Sheep," and the "Lost Coin." These biblical directives will be integrated and woven into an ideology that results in paradigms of redemption and reclamation. The African American Church has "lost" or is losing an important portion of its body. There are specific norms, according to these parables, that those who are in the "Kingdom of God" must obey and implement. The above passages are mentioned in relationship to their relevance as ministerial mandates. This project will also focus on recommended scriptural practices available to the church that foster redemption or reclamation for those affected, and spiritual growth for the collective church.

I will use (1) biblical scriptures, articles, and books by those who have implemented relevant solutions to the issue and (2) surveys offering various opinions on the issue by African American young adults, as well as affected clergy persons.

### Chapter Outlines

The first chapter introduced the problem, and stated the thesis. This chapter lists some of the relevant works addressing the issue, as well as the scope and limitations of the project, and procedures for integration.

Chapter 2 investigates the problem on which this project is based, the importance of the problem, and the thesis. It emphasizes how the church and the community as a whole are affected by the nuances of the dilemma, and proposes that life related transitions at this age also contribute to the problem.

In chapter three the African American young adult is profiled, along with relevant statistics pertaining to the issue.

This project proposes that in most young adults there is an aura of "confidence." They have an attitude that they can and will conquer the world. Chapter 4 details the presence and pitfalls of such bravado characteristics. There is a discernible pattern at this age that directly associates the confidence with a period of crisis. A presence of general doubt about life and disillusion stemming from an individual's lack of progress and failures create "crisis" circumstances.

These nuances are analyzed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 integrates theology with the practical art of ministry. The abstract nature of theology that finds scriptural basis in two parables of Jesus is the basis. The primary theological directive is found in the parables of the "Lost Sheep," and the "Lost Coin," located in Luke, chapter 15, verses 3-10. The resignification (comprehending biblical principles and making them applicable to current situations) motif in relationship to these parables is discernible in "lostness" and especially of being "lost" in the house. The African American young adults who are unchurched, or disenfranchised from the church, essentially are both the "lost" sheep and the "lost" coin depicted in these scriptural passages.

Chapter 6 contains discussions with current "actors" involved in and with this problem. Participants in the study are selected African American young adults who have chosen to remain in the church; those who have had prior church experience but have opted to leave the church; and those who have never had prior church participation. Interviews are conducted with those who find religion and religious participation irrelevant. Pastors of various denominations within the African American Church in the



Los Angeles Basin religious community are documented. An assessment is made of the prevailing thoughts and thought processes of African American young adults in relationship to the church, and to their participation or lack of participation as revealed through the interviews. Correlation with available literature, as well as with biblical directives is considered in an effort to formulate a workable course of action to counter this problem.

Chapter 7 concludes the research, analysis of the findings, and offers recommendations to the church for action. Although a complete and comprehensive resolution to this dilemma may be a considerable reach for this endeavor, its importance renders some form of effort by the composit church absolutely necessary.

## CHAPTER 2

### Issues

Clergy persons in various denominations have begun to panic because of the loss of young people in Christianity. Personal observations and statistical data substantiate their anxiety. Such data as presented by Hoge and Roozen reveal that some churches in general, and the African American Church in particular, lose temporarily, or permanently in some instances, the majority of its youth and young adults either by the time they reach the age of eighteen or upon entrance to college.<sup>1</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, through the Lily Foundation Research study conducted from 1978 to 1983, discovered that at this time, the average total membership in an urban African American Church was 479. They further found that of this total, 120 were "youth."<sup>2</sup> There is no indication of age.

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<sup>1</sup>Hoge and Roozen, 42-48. There are few current sources that document overall or young adult attendance and membership in the African American Church. Those that exist are over 20 years old. I have included a "literary issue" in Chapter 1 (p.13) to address the lack of current surveys and documentation in relationship to current African American young adult membership statistics.

<sup>2</sup>C. Eric Lincoln, and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 141.

It can be reasonably assumed that young adults are included. This figure represents 25 per cent of the total membership. It is doubtful that this is true today. Young adults are perpetually at the bottom of the attendance records of the church compared to other age groups.

Are the desires and goals of this age group any different from those of their ancestors? Are life situations different now than they were in the past? Michael Lee Cohen writes that the desires and dreams of modern young adults are no different than those who preceded them. He asks the question, "What is the twenty-something American Dream?" His answer is that although the "American Dream" can be defined in different ways, its bottom line consists of the same basic things: a family, and a comfortable life.<sup>3</sup>

Social conditions in the United States have changed dramatically in the last three decades. The demographics and the values of the American "black" family are part of this change. In the view of Harriette Pipes McAdoo, "Something is 'wrong' with families through-out America. But something is 'more wrong' with black families."

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<sup>3</sup>Michael Lee Cohen, *The Twenty-Something American Dream: A Cross Country Quest for a Generation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 290.

Families of other ethnicities are described as being in transition, while African American families are described as being on the brink of collapse.<sup>4</sup> Several conditions that reflect this fact are: single mother families in the African American community have increased tremendously over the last twenty-five years. Single parenting by men is on the rise. Parenting by couples of the same gender is also increasing. The increasing number of "step-parenting" homes, with children from previous marriages or relationships, are now commonplace in the culture.<sup>5</sup> McAdoo sees a general decline in family values due to these conditions. These drastically changing conditions and circumstances now threaten the survival of the American family, especially the African American family. She views the family (rather than the church) as being the institution most responsible for the survival of the African American legacy.<sup>6</sup>

Why do African American youth depart from faith communities? Are there factors involved that can be counteracted? One reason is very apparent without much detailed observation. After graduation from high school,

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<sup>4</sup>Harriette Pipes McAdoo, *Black Families*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997), 20.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 5.

many in this age group continue their education in locations outside their neighborhoods. Because of physical necessity, they remove themselves from home, neighborhood, church environment, and most familial involvement. At the same time, an equal number of young adults simply "drop out" from church attendance and participation. This usually occurs when the first measure of independence becomes a reality.

The "twenties" are that time in life that suggests self-reliant confidence. It is the decade of the buccaneers, the adventurers. This is the time when the majority of individuals think that they possess all of the answers to the problems of the cosmos. Some of the reasons for such a comprehensive utopian attitude are rooted in life related experiences and developmental processes. At this age the individual tends to reject parental dominance. For some, college begins, while for others, the first major employment situation arises. The absence of immediate "overseers" to dictate the former proprieties of home, church, or other social institutions brings about newly found freedom. A confidence develops that Alfred McBride labels a "happy blindness."<sup>7</sup> McBride describes this

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<sup>7</sup>Alfred McBride, "Adult Education: A Ministry to Life Cycles," *Religious Education* 72 (March-April 1977): 171-82.

condition as a "situation of bliss." He theorizes that because of an over-abundance of self-reliance, an aura of "contentment" often develops. This confidence in self is rooted in the belief that the individual possesses the ability to deal successfully with or solve any problem.

At this time in life, there is a fluctuation between allegiance to family and to a new network of friends. There is a resolve to be competent (if not responsible) both personally and professionally. A renewed surge of confidence marks each endeavor. Any measure of success adds to this level of personal assuredness. There is evidence of extreme exhibitory energy and an innate perception of building a newer, as well as a better world.<sup>8</sup>

#### Components of Young Adulthood

Typical idiosyncratic components of young adulthood such as vigor, stamina, arrogance, and a sense of a know-it-allness coupled with impatience are at times observable. In most instances, life has not provided an opportunity for theoretical ideals to be applied, analyzed, and proven under practical circumstances. Time and experience are universally the "laboratories" that are necessary to prove authenticity and feasibility in regard to life-related problems. Neither

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 7.

time nor experience has had an opportunity to manifest themselves sufficiently in the existence of the majority of young adults. Reaching a level of maturity is only accessible by and through practical life experiences. The necessary ingredients for attainment of this enlightenment, such as personal failure, realization of personal imperfection, and comprehending the state of ultimate finitude are normally foreign ideas for young adults.

Young adulthood usually enters an individual's life through one or two monumental experiences. One arises with college: the individual leaves home either physically, emotionally, or both. The second circumstance is obtaining the first substantial position of employment. The young person may remain at home, but is practically autonomous by becoming at least partially economically independent.

Very obvious in the decade of the twenties, is the period of confidence, a time when the individual may reek with self-assurance. He or she may exhibit a savoir-faire that almost seems objectionable. In far too many instances, religion, the church, and subsequent exposure to elements of spirituality fall by the wayside; regrettably for some, permanently.

These physical, spiritual, and emotional perplexities

exist and gain strength by means of past, recent, and present social and environmental conditions. Historically, in the last century in the African American Church, young adults have been taught proper respect for older generations. Ideas and personal thought processes of young adults could be expressed, but only at certain times and only in specific ways. Remaining silent and waiting one's turn has been a traditional practice for the young in the African American culture. Silence and patience has always been problematic for many young people. The lack of a "stage" for expressions by this age group has in actuality been a condition that recently has loomed in the background.

The ethos of the secular world, especially freedom and self-expression, is antithetical to the docility that the mainstream Christian religion usually projects. A dichotomous state of consciousness often develops at this time in life. There is the internal urge to be free, to be one's own authority. Conversely, there is the external urgency to remain silent and acquiesce to established behavioral regimens, as dictated by culture and older individuals. Often such demands, if suggested by religious disciplines, are translated as being subservient. At this time of life, being secondary to anything or anyone is not



usually welcomed. In light of the times, the importance given to freedom by society in general, and the powerful, persuasive influence of the young adult peer system, conforming to or remaining in structured religion for African American young adults may be neither acceptable nor attractive.

Historically, another important factor leading to the exodus of this age group from church related activity is the persistent problem of the break-up of the African-American family. Beginning in slavery, the African-American family unit in society has been the victim of external as well as internal separational mechanisms. Slave owners had no regard for family unity. This reality was part of the realization of Bartolome de las Casas, who documented its existence in the West Indies even before slavery in the United States. Casas himself proposed to the officials to substitute (subhuman) Negroes for unjustly enslaved and suffering (human) Amerindians in the Caribbean in the sixteenth century<sup>9</sup> Slaves were perceived as inferior to other humans. Slavery was considered by some to be instituted by God as expressed in 1852 by the Reverend

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<sup>9</sup>Bartolome de las Casas, *Bartolome de las Casas: A Selection of His Writings*, trans. and ed. George Sanderlin (New York: Knopf, 1971), 100-03.

Josiah Priest. Writing in the *Biblical Defense of Slavery*, from his hermeneutic of scriptures Priest proposes:

Thus God has seen fit to do in the creation of the two races of men, the negroes and the whites; one is degraded by natural tendencies, with a curse. As to the intrinsic superiority of a white complexion over that of black, there is no question; for, by the common consent of all ages among men, and even of God himself in heaven, there has been bestowed on white the most honorable distinction. White has become the emblem of moral purity and truth, not only on earth, but in eternity also, as it is said of the saints, that they shall walk with the Lamb in white, not in black (Rev. iii 4, 5). and be clothed in white raiment.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the profit motive was superior to any consideration for preservation of culture. The dictates of slavery made unity and familial stability targets for destruction. Maintenance of family and ideals embraced by other cultures became extremely difficult for slaves and their descendants in the United States.

With the advent of the physical (if not intellectual or economic) emancipation from slavery, "freedom" brought with it new challenges. The major task for newly freed slaves in the South was survival. C. Eric Lincoln writes that share cropping became the most expedient means to achieve this

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<sup>10</sup>Josiah Priest, *Bible Defense of Slavery or the Origin, History, and Fortunes of the Negro Race*. (Glasgow, Ky.: W. S. Brown, 1853; reprint, Detroit: Negro History Press, 1969), 164, 166.

necessity.<sup>11</sup> Soon thereafter the Industrial Revolution started and the urbanization process began for the American "Negro."<sup>12</sup> Moving from a rural to an urban environment offered opportunities; as well as problems: new milieus in addition to different ethical and moral standards, added responsibilities, increased ethical and economic necessities. Innovative modes of discrimination by the dominant cultures became part of the African American urban experience. Because of these factors, African American families became susceptible to changing nuances of separation and oppression. Wives and children were often left in southern rural confines while husbands ventured to urban, industrial areas to seek employment.<sup>13</sup> C. Franklin Frazier documents the many problems that urban existence presented to the African American family, such as footloose men, homeless women, and broken family ties. These negative situations were accentuated by malevolent oppressors who no longer had the advantages of slavery at their disposal; other, more sophisticated forms of mistreatment surfaced.

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<sup>11</sup>C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Pilgrimage in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 72.

<sup>12</sup>E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*; and *The Black Church Since Frazier*, by C. Eric Lincoln (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 52, 53.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

Some theorist such as Earl Ofari Hutchinson hypothesize that in order to keep the African American subservient, a planned cultural disenfranchisement was used as a tool of the oppressor.<sup>14</sup> The success of this plan was dependent on the ideology of granting unequal power to African American females. According to this premise, in the minds of the oppressor, such a condition would permanently cripple any positive collective progress.

#### Neo-Social Deterrents

Within the last three decades, social deterrents such as the decline in the American labor situation, and the advent of a general permissive attitude, is evident in all Americans, including African-Americans. Overall lessened desire and pursuit of higher education by African-Americans is now the norm rather than the exception. Unrealistic objectives of obtaining fame and making fortunes in sports or entertainment are fueled by the success of African American "mega" luminaries. These quests are usually sought after in lieu of equal educational efforts. Statistics reveal a very small percentage of the total population find success in these endeavors. Sociologist James Edwards

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<sup>14</sup>Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *The Assassination of the Black Male Image* (Los Angeles: Middle Passage Press, 1994). 70.

theorizes, as reported by Earl Ofari Hutchinson, that a high school athlete had a better chance of being hit on the head by a meteor than he had of making a professional sports team.<sup>15</sup> Success in entertainment is also an improbable possibility.

The influence of the gang culture has spread to all areas of American society, regardless of social, racial, or economic strata. The "gangsta" sub-culture universally has exhibited traits that exalt materialistic, violent, and revenge oriented incentives that are antithetical to Christian tenets. Thelma Golden illustrates what she considers to be the cumulative negative effect of hard-core rap music. She writes, "Some hard-core rap music is producing images and ideas that I, among others are finding intolerable. Many young rappers have customized the already saddening sexual hierarchies in America for their own cultures and to meet their own needs. They promote the invincibility and superiority of the black male."<sup>16</sup>

African Americans in their late teens and twenties, have had little social power. They fall into the category

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>16</sup>Thelma Golden, *Black Males: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994), 155.

described by Joanne Grant in relationship to the African Americans in general in the American population. The young adult is a part of the social system, but without tangible power. He or she is a "citizen, yet he or she is not."<sup>17</sup> At these ages individuals possess neither the financial nor political clout to be a force, nor to force any issue. Their roles are traditionally that of the "gopher." Male and female alike learn from black culture that they are to sit, listen, and learn the ways of life. These activities prepare them for the time when opportunity would render positions of power.

Questions regarding political or social issues, or the opinions and ideas held individually or collectively have not warranted substantial consideration. Inquiries concerning religious matters, issues of belief, spirituality, or questions about the operational elements of ecclesia have not been consistently opened for discussion. These and other situations have tended to create a feeling of being left out, of not being included in any significant decision making procedures in church matters.

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<sup>17</sup> Joanne Grant, *Black Protest: History, Documents, and Analyses, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1968), 8.

Similar problems, coupled with trends in educational arenas to downgrade or even disregard the necessity for belief in the Christian religion, began to surface. There were articulations of newly emerging beliefs that Christianity was and is only necessary for the unlearned and unsophisticated.<sup>18</sup> Other religious expressions are also factors. Charles R. Foster finds that the growth of Muslim and Pan African religious movements provide for urban people a wider range of options for faith commitments than offered by major black Christian churches.<sup>19</sup> These and similar ideologies served as fodder for further trends of apostasy among a fraction of African American young adults in the recent past.

There are other situations that contribute to departure from church activity or rebellion to existing religious tradition and belief structure. Recent trends among African Americans toward Afro-centric racial pride, nationalism, and Pan-Africanism have become relevant to the issue. For a sizable number of this age group, the entire Christian

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<sup>18</sup>Edward C. Graves, *The Invisible Chains*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth: Capricorn Enterprises, 1993), 7.

<sup>19</sup>Charles R. Foster, "Elements of a Black Youth Ministry," in *Working with Black Youth: Opportunities for Christian Ministry*, eds. Charles R. Foster and Grant S. Shockley (Nashville: Abingdon Press: 1989), 191.

belief structure is an "invention" of the Euro-centric Anglo-Saxon oppressors. The design and purpose was and is a specific device used by the dominant society to oppress. "Proper" discernment of the situation indicates that most "enlightened" Anglo-Saxons do not believe in a transcendent or imminent being. Such thinking is discernible in the words of Elijah Muhammed:

Christianity is a religion organized and backed by the devils for the purpose of making slaves of black mankind....Our first step is to give back the white man his religion, Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

It was advantageous for them to have those under servitude to believe in "God" and to look for improved personal and social circumstances only in the hereafter. "Enlightenment" enables the enlightened to comprehend that these malevolent mechanisms serve to make it easier to suppress, oppress, and dominate subservient cultures. Therefore, many African American young adults were convinced that for an African American to be truly liberated, enlightened, and empowered, they must see through the smoke-screen that had befallen their ancestors, and throw off the

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<sup>20</sup>Mark L. Chapman, "Christianity is the White Man's Religion: Elijah Muhammad's Nationalist Critique of Christianity," in *Christianity on Trial: African-American Religious Thought Before and After Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 42.



shackles of Christianity. Religion was the chain that binds a culture to servitude. Many young adults agree with the following statement by The Honorable Elijah Muhammed:

Christianity is one of the most perfect black-slave-making religions on the planet. It has completely killed the so-called Negroes mentally, 1965.<sup>21</sup>

Also contributing to the problem is the materialistic nature of American society. The ultimate plateau of success in the minds of some Americans equates to what one can obtain. The American populace is a target for the bombardment of the ideology to acquire, and acquire at any cost. Acquisition, in the minds of many is the epitome of success. The capitalistic system, utilizes the mass media to present and to sell its products. More sales enhances higher profits. In the minds of many, profit motives surpass moral considerations. The "sell by any means" mentality, without consideration for the welfare of the public, has prevailed in many commercial enterprises. Conversely, the economy, values, morality, and other important cultural doctrines necessary to keep societies in balance have failed to balance the desire to acquire.

Many commercial ventures and activities exist that verbalize, enhance, and encourage the augmentation of

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 20.

unchecked and dubious commercialism within the society. Acceptability in the minds of many depends on having the right clothes, the "in" fragrance, wearing the acceptable hair "do," possessing the right automobile, or even the donning celebrated athletic shoes or attire. Consideration and respect are often withheld from those who are financially unable to earn such items. Absence of morality and ethics is on the rise in the general society, and are also absent in activities of the individual. Some ethicists and theologians feel that this condition is systemic or institutionally generated and/or perpetuated. Referring to the cause of many social/economic injustices, John E. Jacob writes, "Its a vicious cycle, dysfunctional behavior is caused by economic, educational, and social factors. And those in turn are caused by the heritage of racism."<sup>22</sup>

The "system" dictates that those at the bottom have very little chance for financial upward mobility. Yet the "sell at any cost" phenomenon continues. Those who do not have, or have little opportunity to obtain those "things" legally or morally, often turn to other means for

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<sup>22</sup>John E. Jacob, *Social Justice: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1990), 112-13.

acquisition. These quests often cause some to resort to illegal or immoral measures to obtain necessary funds.

In recent years, the proliferation of the "gang culture" along with a general trend of rebellion has become vogue in urban, as well as rural areas. Increasing amounts of individuals in early, middle, and late puberty, as well as young adults now embrace the concepts and precepts of this life style and ideology. In defiance of authority, and because of rejection of traditional values, portions of African American youth and young adults rebuff accepted morality and religious tenets. Some view such belief structures embraced by their predecessors as outdated and not conducive to success. Religion and the practice of Christianity for them does not contain accessible avenues to the conceived American dream. These individuals find it necessary to incorporate other measures to gain material substance. Morality and ethical considerations often are deemed undesirable or irrelevant. They are assessed as traits expected of good "Negroes" by the hypocritical dominant society. Obtaining "things" and the quest for materialistic gain at any cost becomes their reality. Christian values, in many instances, have been discarded by this particular sector of the African American subculture.

Sensationalism in reporting negative situations within the African American community has become a focus of media attention. A constant diet of negative "gangsta" activity appears on television, radio, film, and especially in the recording industry. This kind of notice serves as a built-in recruitment mechanism for the impressionable young mind. The (supposed) glamour and desirability of this lifestyle is depicted in ways that often falsely project it as appealing, thus perpetuating its existence.

Adding to the problem is the fact that many commercial enterprises push for increased sales without regard for moral differentiation. The overall result has been a drastic decline in communal morals. For the last two decades this was noticeable in the urban areas of the United States. Recently the trend has spread to some rural areas. Many theologians cite lowered morality levels throughout the United States. They take the position that over recent years, many have either lost or never been exposed to former moral principles.

Many scholars and theologians recognize the presence of diminished moral values in the African American community as being a by-product of oppression. Garth (Kasimu) Baker-Fletcher writes, "When people are self-Imprisoned, their

ethical process is thwarted and their moral processes issue forth both self-destructive and antisocial behavior."<sup>23</sup>

This principle is based on the idea that African Americans have been *imprisoned* physically, emotionally, socially, and economically by the dominant culture. As a result, in the opinion of Garth Baker-Fletcher, Africans Americans have internalized much of the negative influences of Euro-domination and have created what he refers to as "Imprisonment."<sup>24</sup> The ramifications of this hypothesis contributes to the human sinfulness now existent in African American communities.<sup>25</sup>

The lessened moral level found in some black communities can be best understood through the words of Reverend Cecil Williams, Pastor of the Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in the Tenderloin section of San Francisco, California. In describing the status of the neighborhood and the advent of crack cocaine he writes,

I thought I had seen it all, but in the late 1980s, something toxic and lethal settled on the street. I began to smell death. The Tenderloin neighborhood looked much the same. Flophouses, dealers, pimps, and the refuse of humanity lined

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<sup>23</sup>Karen Baker Fletcher and Garth (Kasimu) Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother: Womanist and Xodus God-Talk* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1997), 126.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 125.

the streets--nothing new about that.  
.....Something else was stinking up the  
neighborhood. Crack cocaine was causing that  
stench of death.<sup>26</sup>

Ethical conflicts and disagreements within the ranks of institutionalized religious organizations and governmental institutions also have cast shadows of negative influence. The failure of some Clergypersons and political figures to maintain acceptable ethical and moral standards are examples of negative role models.

Recently, individual educational advancement (and opportunity) in African American scholarship has suffered. Levels of academic achievement for the African American student, especially for and in the African-American male population, has declined over the last two decades. African American prison statistics are on the rise for both male and female young adults. With the decline of the family, and traditional African American family life, all channels that served as passageways for culture and heritage also has declined. The likelihood of losing the *legacy of religion* as well as religious association becomes increasingly possible. If the young of the culture consistently resist

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<sup>26</sup>Cecil Williams, *No Hiding Place: Empowerment and Recovery for Our Troubled Communities* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 2.

religious involvement, and reject the beliefs of their predecessors, the entire religious framework is in jeopardy.

Cultural considerations and racial legacies are important components for people, because they assist in the maintenance of identity. In the past, influences entered one's existence from familial, communal, and ecclesiastical sources. New societal sources are now becoming increasingly important motivating factors. Replacing the "prepare and wait" incentives of the past is the "get at all costs" impetus that now exists and is endorsed by many individuals in all social constructs. Several social circumstances support this reality.

The advent of the drug culture negated for some African Americans the desire and necessity of fostering and perpetuating active participation in the institution of traditional African American parenthood. A time honored and cherished stable of African American life, "quality" motherhood, because of contemporary nuances is being diminished. Addiction to chemicals has caused many young African American mothers to neglect, or even desert their offspring. Edward C. Graves eloquently notes the presence of the chemical threat. He writes:

The children of God were headed for the  
promise land of life. African Americans are

trying to endure the elements of the hot wastelands. Great prophets such as Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad have guided African Americans through the valleys and pitfalls are on a journey. Now an evil famine have spread throughout the land. A famine that is treacherous and cunning that effects all of us in the one way or another. The baffling disease of drug and alcohol addiction have distracted the liberation movement and sent many of us deep into the wilderness.<sup>27</sup>

A new phenomenon has surfaced from these conditions: grandparents raising and financially supporting grandchildren at a greatly elevated rate. Grandparent responsibility on such an enlarged scale has caused personal and social dilemmas that governmental agencies are neither able, nor willing to consider or counter. This is an additional challenge for the church. The task of assisting and educating affected grandparents to new approaches in child rearing is necessary. Such changes in the "landscape" of operations are new problems for the church.

Over the last three decades the state of the economy has changed rapidly. The lack of jobs and changes in employment in recent years has caused an over-dependence on the welfare system for survival. Statistics reveal that in some situations, three generations have been welfare recipients. Earl Ofari Hutchinson notes in relationship to

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<sup>27</sup>Graves, 38.



the blight of the black poor, "The black poor, lacking education, competitive skills and training, were further hurtled to the outer fringes of society. Many others simply plunged deeper into the morass of poverty and welfare dependency."<sup>28</sup> In such cases, the absence of employment has not only perpetuated "welfare mentality," but has diminished incentives for employment.<sup>29</sup>

Quick and often illegal methods for acquiring finances has affected the community's collective work ethic. Presently in the African American community growing amounts of legal and illegal "schemes" exist to secure funds.

The changing nuances of employment also factor into the issue. Contemporary conditions within the corporate world require individual occupational flexibility. It is now an accepted principle that one will change jobs or occupations at least three times in a life time.

#### Ethical Considerations

Moreover, there is also deterioration in the over-all religious ethic that affects the "ethos" of morality in the secular, religious, and social setting. Such situations

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<sup>28</sup>Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *The Crisis in Black and Black* (Los Angeles: Middle Passage Press, 1998), 109.

<sup>29</sup>Graves, 33-35.

provide more fuel that feeds the fire which complicates and prolongs the agony in achieving healthy adulthood.

Essentially, what is now happening reflects Dietrich Bonhoeffer's assertion of the "world coming of age".

Bonhoeffer ponders the condition of total moral fanaticism.

He conceptualizes the fanatic as imaging that his or her moral purity will prove a match for the power of evil.<sup>30</sup> In

essence, many young adults are fanatics in relationship to their abilities to conquer the maturing process. Allen J.

Moore sheds more light on the subject in the following

quote, "Young adults are not only going through transition from adolescence to adulthood, but they are also a part of a cultural transition in which mankind is in the process of growing up."<sup>31</sup> The intricate problems of this composite process become problematic for most young adults.

Contemporary young adults have been raised under the influence of science and technology. They have been recipients of a growing confidence in humanity's ability to solve its own problems. A belief in an enlarged faith in a

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<sup>30</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1953), 14.

<sup>31</sup>Allen J. Moore, *The Young Adult Generation: A Perspective on the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1969), 12-13.

universe which holds no secrets, and a belief in the essential intelligibility of an "Ultimate Moral Being" is becoming less prevalent according to Moore.<sup>32</sup>

Such existing social, moral, and ethical situations that function as causes of the problem can be contravened by the African American Church and used as incentives for the solutions to the problem. These are the objectives. They must be recognized and implemented to preserve and reclaim a valuable resource. It is one of the challenges that the African American Church faces at the advent of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 31.

## CHAPTER 3

## Demographics

The focus group of this study, the African American young adult can be delineated via information gleaned from the following data. The subjects are male and female. Their distinctive identification is derived from the fact that they are descendants of immigrated Africans. The degree of African genetic presence differs widely due to births generated from relationship with other ethnicities over the past 379 years. The overall African American population in the United States as of November 1, 1997, is an estimated 34 million (12.7 percent of the total population). The median age is 29.8 years, which is 8 years younger than the non-Hispanic white population. Approximately 19.2 percent of the total African American population falls in the young adult age range (18-30). Therefore, the African American young adult population in the United States consist of approximately 6.5 million.<sup>1</sup> African American males comprise 48 percent (3.1 million), compared to 52 percent (3.9 million) the African American females.

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Department of Commerce, *General Profile of the United States, 1998*, On line, Available from Netscape @ [hppt://govinfo.library.orst.edu/cgi-bin/buildit?ala-state.usa](http://govinfo.library.orst.edu/cgi-bin/buildit?ala-state.usa)

As of 1995, 74 percent of African Americans from ages 25-29 had at least a high school diploma, 13 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. The proportion of African Americans who finished high school improved significantly from 1980-1995, from 81 percent to 87 percent.<sup>2</sup> African American males, age 15 to 24, are 6 times more likely than white males, and 4 times more likely than black females to die from homicide.<sup>3</sup> Homicide and accidents (including vehicular accidents) are the leading causes of death among black males.

Bruce Hare has proven that black children are endowed innately with equal childhood potential as all other ethnic groups. Yet in the youth years, they are at a disadvantage.<sup>4</sup> The drop-out rate for black males, ages 16 and older, is nearly 50 percent of the student enrollment. The unemployment rate for black males ranges from 46 per cent to 52 per cent. The leading cause of death of black males between the age of 16 and 20 is homicide (usually at the hands of another black). In the African American male

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<sup>2</sup>Minorities Job Bank, *African American Census Facts*, 4 Sept. 1995, on-line, available from Netscape @ <http://www.minorities-jb.com/african/aframer.html#education>

<sup>3</sup>Rice, 11.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce Hare, "Structural Inequality and the Endangered Status of Black Youth," *Journal of Negro Education* 56, no. 1 (winter 1987): 104.

population, 1 out of every 22 blacks will be killed by violent crime, 1 out of every 6 black males will be arrested by the time they reached age 19.<sup>5</sup>

Almost 9 percent of unmarried African American teenagers have out-of-wedlock births, compared to 2 percent for white adolescents.<sup>6</sup> The overall annual median income for African American men is \$25,350 which is 72 percent of that of non-Hispanic white men. African American women earned an average of \$20,610, which is 85 percent of non-Hispanic white women. There were 8.1 million African American families in 1996, 46 per cent of them were married couple families. Statistics reveal that 57 percent of these families had children, with an average of 2 per family. Studies show that of individuals over the age of 15, 41 percent of men and 37 percent of women are married.

In actuality, African American young adults exist in a wide range of varieties. Consider the following facts:

1. Some are single, but more are married.
2. Some are drop-outs; others have completed high school and college.

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<sup>5</sup>U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics* (Washington. D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>James Wentzel, *American Youth: A Statistical Snapshot*. (New York: W. T. Grant Foundation, 1987), 24.

3. Some are teen-age young marrieds and parents, others are single.
4. 4 out of 10 have been in their present job situation less than 1 year, and over half receive incomes less than \$3,500 a year<sup>7</sup>

For ages 18-21, studies show that 71 percent are single, compared to the ages of 26-29, in which 85 percent are married. Among the married, 9 out of 10 say that their homes are primary meeting places. For single young adults, schools, bars, and different types of drive-ins, are important meeting places. Less than 10 percent of both single and married young adults mentioned church as a place to meet friends.<sup>8</sup>

Young adults are more likely to change jobs and move from one place to another. Changes in the job situation and a desire to take jobs that provide upward mobility or provide justification for marriage and initiating a home are observable as cause for moves and job changes. Half of the target group for this study wanted to "settle down" in a city. Young adult men show more signs of being unsettled

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas R. Bennett, "A Profile of the Young Adult." *International Journal of Religious Education* 42 (1965): 8-9. The article was derived from a comprehensive research study among 1,222 young adults conducted in Springfield, Massachusetts and Lincoln, Nebraska by Allen Ellsworth of the National Board of the YMCA in 1964.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

because of the world situation.<sup>9</sup>

Employment in young adults has a lower level than in the general population. Figures show that 20 percent of all job-seekers are teenagers, and in the 20-24 age bracket over 14 percent are unemployed. Among high school drop-outs over 30 per cent are unemployed. Married young adults tend to be more adaptable to both employment situations and financial responsibilities than young adults who are single.<sup>10</sup>

National studies show that young adults consistently appear to be more self-centered, seeking every advantage for promoting his or her own welfare. Individuals show near peak intellectual and creative abilities at this age. Yet little attention is given to political or civic activities. Of those eligible to vote, only 51 percent exercise this civic privilege. Only 1 in 10 help in community campaigns and 1/3 of young adults work in a church. Evidence suggests that persons in their early 20s delay community participation until they've established a home and have children.<sup>11</sup>

Interesting enough, most young adults want to feel that they are part of the community. They want to be recognized and achieve personal significance and success.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 10.



They are searching. They are "fledglings" out of the nest, trying their "wings."<sup>12</sup> The following statistic should be of special importance to the church, namely that only 6 out of every 10 claim church membership.<sup>13</sup>

African American young adults have the added burden of competing in a secular world while conforming to the norms and traditions of the sub-culture. Often there are monumental contradictions in the ideology recognized by the two elements.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 12.

## CHAPTER 4

### Young Adulthood: Confidence and Crisis

#### The Confidence

Recently, this writer noticed a message written on the back of a tee shirt worn by an individual in his twenties. This person's manner and carriage exhibited self-reliance. It read, "Absolutely, positively, most definitely, without doubt, NO FEAR! (not even a little bit.)" These words and their consummate meaning perhaps best describe the attitude, the confidence, and the arrogance of the majority of people in their twenties.

Young adulthood is a long-anticipated time of life that explodes with contradictions. Those involved usually inaccurately equate physical maturation with complete spiritual and empirical development. At eighteen, confidence reigns. This dispositional situation sometimes continues for the emerging young adult, until life has the opportunity to teach lessons of humility and patience. The typical young adult seems to possess a built-in conviction that he or she not only "knows" all of the answers to life's

questions, but that they know all the correct answers. Young adults, (approximate ages 18-22) live in a simplistic world. In this world, solutions to problems arrive with the least amount of work or thought. Unproved and sometimes totally irreverent explications become rejoinders to the most complex problems.

Yet, the brazen personality traits of self-assurance and certitude observable in some young adults are not entirely negative. They may seem obnoxious, but this conduct contains many positive elements. Such actions, while at first glance objectionable, are understood by some to be necessary for growth. Therefore, they are desirable idiosyncrasies.

Such understanding of this condition is documented by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. She writes: "It is the duty of youth to bring its fresh new power to bear on social progress. Each generation of young people should be to the world like a vast reserve force to a tired army. They should lift the world forward. That is what they are for."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Carolyn Warner, comp., *The Last Word: A Treasury of Women's Quotes* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Publishers, 1992), 21.

Often new ideas and advancements in international communities are envisioned and implemented by young adults.

The following questions can be legitimately asked. Is the egotism and cockiness often observed in the mannerisms and actions of young adults warranted? Does the individual and society benefit by its presence? Michael Harrington feels that the "new" young adult generation is symbolic of the new era that is taking shape in our society. He feels that this age group essentially mirrors what we all have become. In his book he states that in the twentieth century, "something enormous is being born and at the same time something is dying."<sup>2</sup> Young adults are emblematic of both coming and going. They are the new life that rises from old growth. Through contemporary African American young adults, come an assurance of continued African American Church growth. What may be dying is a need and a desire by many African American young adults to remain part of the African American institutionalized church.

These questions lead us into an examination of one of this chapter's themes. Why is confidence necessary? To

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<sup>2</sup>Michael Harrington, *The Accidental Century* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), 13.

better understand the reasons that make this young adulthood constituency important, one must explore and comprehend the vicissitudes of individual psychological development. Each stage of life requires growth in various areas that perpetually create constant states of evolution.

Lillian Troll of Rutgers University deals extensively in the area of individual development. In one's life-span there are, she observes various periods of development and change. One of her discoveries is that in mature adulthood changes are less frequent than in the age span from eighteen to thirty. Adulthood for the most part is more stable.<sup>3</sup> The lack of such stability in young adults is not necessary negative. Often it is positive and a necessary component of the evolutionary process. It is possible that increased insight into the details of this process is achieved through proper scrutiny of the procedure here loosely referred to as "understanding." The church must take time to properly assess what is presently transpiring and execute measures to counter the effect.

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<sup>3</sup>Lillian E. Troll, *Early and Middle Adulthood: The Best Is Yet to Come...Maybe* (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1975), 2-3.

The process of understanding also is advantageous for factually analyzing and comprehending the logic (or lack of such) surrounding the actions taken by young adults during their twenties. Is the presence of extreme confidence based on developmental necessity? Why does the phenomenon repeatedly occur at this particular stage of human development?

Each life cycle stage, including infancy, childhood, puberty, adolescence, and young adulthood are inter-linked components of one's existence. Essentially they are periods where the individual is or should be preparing for an efficacious adulthood. Each experience shapes and molds the individual, if not consciously, then subconsciously. Ideally, each experience serves to form positive characteristics. Most sociologists believe that these life stages prepare individuals for a productive and happy adulthood. The existing world is not a utopia. In reality, the best hoped for scenario involves enough positive experiences in the individual's life to overcome negative ones. In an optimal situation, these beneficial factors properly prepare the individual to deal with the negatives of the future. The reality, usually is a result short of

this objective. Yet, the fact is that each stage of life is part of a never-ending evolutionary process.

With this in mind, let us consider why the "confidence" of young adulthood is necessary. First, it would be expeditious to ponder what is "adulthood" or maturity.

Daniel Offer and Melvin Sabshin define "mature" as the state of attaining normal peak growth and development. In maturity, one comes into full development in relationship to a preconceived and accepted size, strength, weight, and intellectual capacity. Offer and Sabskin further define maturity through an illustration that compares the state of full (complete) development to that of a piece of fruit. When fruit becomes mature it is "ripe." If the process of maturing continues, then the "fruit" becomes overripe and then becomes rotten.<sup>4</sup>

Offer and Sabshin emphasize two significant elements in relationship to the maturing process. First there are gender differences. The female usually matures both physically and psychologically faster than the male. The reason for these

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<sup>4</sup>Robert A. Arnstein, "Young Adulthood: Stages of Maturity," in *Normality and the Life Cycle: A Critical Integration* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 112.

dissimilarities are not fully understood. The other cause is the result of biological and socio-cultural differences in rearing, and expectations by society. Sociologists have concluded that there are four standards in the measurement of maturity. They are:

1. The presence of normal biological growth. if nutrition has been adequate, and illness has not intervened, the individuals should have at this time of life obtained proper weight, height, and physical progression.

2. The presence of proper intellectual development. This progression is largely dependent on educational opportunity and/or effort afforded to, or by the individual.

3. The existence of accepted psychological or emotional standards. Perhaps this component does more than any other to determine the individual's definition of adulthood. Adulthood is only attainable through successful completion of the psychological tasks of adolescence.

4. The presence and utilization of socio-cultural standards. What is expected of an adult is usually shaped by cultural and social customs. Different plateaus are expected for different ages and different genders.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 4.



Keep these ideals in mind as we consider the whys and whats of the confidence issue in young adulthood. Usually at the age of eighteen, in reasonable situations, the emerging young adult has had close to nineteen years of growth, protection, instruction, and other proportional activities geared toward making him or her independent individuals. Subconsciously, all of the directives, the spoken and unspoken expectations, and personal dreams and aspirations are part of the individual's consciousness.

Young adulthood is the time in which a move from the dimension of "child" and "learner" shifts basically to that of the application of lessons learned. The theoretical, ideally is transferred into the practical. The learner now takes on dual roles. He or she must become detached from the total protection and direction of the home and parents and assume a degree of autonomy. The continuation of his or her education complicates the condition. The personal dreams of the individual, along with the expectations of family, significant others, peers, and of cultural and social situations are not now at hand for him or her to achieve. The time to function has come. The ball of life

is now in the individual's court. He or she must put up or in essence "shut up."

To begin an attempt to accomplish such monumental objectives requires self-certainty and conviction. Hesitant attitudes are not tolerated. One must be confident. Perhaps over-confidence is preferable to indecisiveness. Confidence, in one's ability at this stage of life, is of the utmost importance. Confidence is a significant part of the evolutionary progress. It is absolutely necessary for what lies ahead. Confidence is important as a part of the healthy progression of life. Yet, over-emphasis or expression of assurance in oneself creates the possibility of adverse results. The trend to rely on self, on misguided independence, often is detrimental.

In *Pathfinders*, Gail Sheehy describes how people find their way through this particular transitional process. She labels the ages of eighteen to twenty-two as the time of pulling up roots. Separation is made between parents and the security of home. Sheehy further depicts the ages from twenty-three to twenty seven a time that one tries on life's "uniforms" and involve themselves in the delicate exercise

of intimacy.<sup>6</sup> Separation from life-long security blankets is recognized by sociologists to require high levels of self-assurance. Therefore, healthy young adults utilize this intrinsic trait as a built-in mechanism for defense and for projection into another phase of life.

In addition to these issues that exist in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, there are added obstacles for the African American. Theodore E. Jones acknowledge this truth and articulate addition dilemmas inherent to African Americans.<sup>7</sup> The individual of African descent enters the threshold of personhood seeking an image he or she does not know in a world he or she does not understand. They contend with a physical body that they are still discovering. They have mixed desires to be individuals who can independently assert themselves, while at the same time fearing the loss of security and reassurance that family offers. There also exists for African American young adults the psychological struggle

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<sup>6</sup>Gail Sheehy, *Pathfinders: Overcoming the Crises of Adult Life and Finding Your Own Path to Well-Being*. (Toronto: Bantam Books 1982), 62-3.

<sup>7</sup>Theodore E. Jones, "Needs of Negro Youth," in *The Young Adult: Identity and Awareness*, eds. Gerald D. Winter and Eugene M. Nuss (Glenview, Il.: Scott, Foresman 1969), 332.

with the racial issue. Usually there is an ardent desire to throw off the stigma of second-class citizenship. At the same time there may be the realization that some adaptation to the majority system is necessary for survival.

### The Crisis

Presently, as in the past, African American young adults are seeking an image; a self-identity that fulfills a need. Among these needs are quests for personal significance and acceptance. Society often projects negative connotations of the terms "black" and "blackness." African American young adults have begun to reinterpret "black" and "blackness", transforming them from negative to positive. For many African American young adults, ingredients being accessed in the positive aspect are personal as well as racial dignity. Many also possess, the until now, unheard of audacity to challenge and even reject long standing cultural principles in favor of newly formulated beliefs and tenets. These ideal sometimes diametrically oppose, challenge, and provoke accepted cultural ideologies.

These developments stem from what the modern young adult sees and comprehends about the world in which they reside. There exists in government, academia, and the media, little

affirmation of worth for the African American race. Contained within this reasoning a reality that only small constructive roles exist within the American system for the contributions of persons of color. It is from these conditions that Jones formulate what he sees as a "wall of separation" between African American youth and the general society.<sup>8</sup>

Humans have a shared innate characteristic that enables them to ward off undesired physical or mental realities when the time is appropriate. Involved in the rebellion process are both the necessity and ability to place blame. In the minds of dissenting African American adults, responsibility for the present situation has points of origin. American society, which is based on Euro-centric ideals of supremacy and colonialism, is viewed as being intrinsically responsible. Parents and predecessors are sometimes also viewed as being responsible. Some African American young adults believe the institutionalized church bears a great deal of responsibility. Many African Americans feel that more could have been done by their predecessors to preserve culture, and to resist submission. Christianity is viewed

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 7.

as the oppressor's religion. Christianity perpetuates the status quo.<sup>9</sup>

With these social conditions as a backdrop, the objective for many African Americans is to become one's own person, and to pave a creative path in an unfriendly and biased secular maze. It is understandable that confidence in plenitude becomes an indispensable component in one's thought process at this age period. Life and what life requires cannot be accomplished by individuals who do not see in themselves the abilities or the courage to proceed.

Also relevant to the confidence theme is how the individual internalizes the concept of symbols. The United States in modernity is in reality an emblematic conglomerate. Success and even self-worth often are commensurate with what and how much one is able to attain. Certain automobiles, particular brands of clothing, and where one resides determines where and how that individual functions within his or her fraternity. Convictions play a major role in how material goods are acquired and maintained. Meekness and hesitancy are antithetical to the ends that certain sectors of society hold in esteem.

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<sup>9</sup>Chapman, 42.

Therefore, confidence becomes, in itself, perhaps the principal "symbol" that one must have to withstand the vicissitudes of life and the environment. Young adults experience what is called "formal operational stage."<sup>10</sup> In this developmental interval, intelligence is demonstrated through the logical use of symbols related to abstract concepts. This process involves strong egocentrism. Theoretical and hypothetical constructs become very important in the individual consciousness. It is incumbent upon the church to comprehend that at this fragile juncture in life, the development and acceptance of negative symbols, and the means to acquire these symbols are readily accessible. It also is important that the African American Church comprehends the absolute necessity for positive symbols derived ideally from home, church, and the environment. Properly channeled spiritual values and practices are needed when life erodes the confidence factor. The overabundance of negative symbolism, without the presence of values and spiritual advancement, even for

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<sup>10</sup>John Hummel, *Cognitive Development*. 1 Oct. 1996, on-line, available from Netscape @ <http://www.valdosta.peachnet.edu/~whitt:buffer/10-1996> File:windows

African American young adults that remain in the church, sets the stage for crisis.

The origin of major crisis situations for young adults, and its subsequent perpetuation is traceable to events and circumstances of childhood. What transpires and how it transpires is very influential in the molding of what we will become as adults. The American parent in many ways is too accommodating. Conceivably, there should be more wisdom and restraint in what American children receive. More emphasis on personal responsibility is advisable in the formative years. Life related techniques such as situational adaptation and exposure to anticipated scenarios are tools of preparation indispensable for what young people will encounter. Present in the psyche of all individuals are innate inclinations that prove to be detrimental if not properly understood.

Roger L. Gould expertly captures the importance of what every individual experiences at the onset of life, and the eventual effect it has both consciously and subconsciously, in his coining of the phrase the "pains of childhood."

Gould writes:

The physical hazards of life overwhelm our fledgling controls. We want to walk before we



are able; we demand more attention than we can possibly get; we fight for greater rights and power than we can manage; and our sensuous desires and passions are insatiable. In short, as young children we want what we want, when we want it, and how we want it. We feel that every need is an unalienable right. Our smallest wish is an extension of ourselves. Deny us slightly, and we experience overwhelming frustrations and unnecessary humiliating disappointment.<sup>11</sup>

For many, this trend carries on into the adolescent years. Egocentric attitudes exist with little opposition. Attitudes develop, sometimes negative in nature, strengthened by innate feelings of importance and indestructibility. It is very easy for the sheltered, pampered, child to evolve into a self-centered, self-indulgent, adolescent. Peter Blos has designated a period that occurs in humans between adolescence and adulthood. He labels this period of life as "post-adolescence." Blos observes the four developmental tasks that lead the post-adolescent into adulthood:

1. The recapitulation of the individuation process
2. The development of ego continuity through a personal view of one's past, present, and future
3. The mastery of residual trauma from childhood
4. The formation of sexual identity as the base

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<sup>11</sup>Roger L. Gould, *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 19.

for future establishment of stable, adult human relations.<sup>12</sup>

For most individuals, the time span between twenty-two and twenty-six becomes a period of self re-evaluation. The individual often asks crucial questions. "Who am I?" "What is the meaning of life?" "Where am I going?" Values come into question and are frequently modified or discarded.

William F. Kraft refers to this situation as the "crisis of young-adulthood." He further explains,

New methods in which to affirm one's identity become a major objective. New emphases replace old conceptualizations in relationship to life situations. Additional life related questions arise. The individual may find significance and fulfillment as experienced in the recent past elusive. Often, nothing held dear in the past, including religious exposure or experience now makes sense.<sup>13</sup>

The above scenario is an act of self-confrontation. Encountering oneself at this stage of life, and in this manner, involves personal introspection. Inquisition is normative. Personal assessment, self-analysis, and

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<sup>12</sup>Peter Blos, *The Adolescent Passage: Developmental Issues* (New York: International Universities Press, 1979), 19.

<sup>13</sup>William F. Kraft, *Achieving Promises: A Spiritual Guide for the Transitions of Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 26.

dissatisfaction are to be expected. These procedures undergird plans for future growth. Notwithstanding this reality, there lies the potential for psychological pitfalls. Conceivable hazards that may materialize include dissatisfaction with the status quo, misunderstanding the situation, a lack of proper preparation, and the absence of hope. Much too often, answers to life's most complicated questions emerge without complete comprehension of the situation, or accurate appraisal of conceivable difficulties.

Because of the presence of the above situations, the lives of post-adolescent individuals, regardless of gender, encounters, particulars, and/or circumstances, are ripe for the development of crises. If the individual advances to this life stage without proper preparation, there is vast potential for negative physiological and psychological consequences.

A study conducted in 1977 by George E. Vaillant revealed that by the age of twenty, ninety-five percent of average individuals had exhibited a vignette (picture) with defensive mechanism of "acting out." In the majority of situations, this mode of communication was the major vehicle

of expression.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, from this realization, it appears that a natural course of action for individuals of the late teens and early twenties is to "act out" social, psychological, and educational belief structures. Previous dormant or suppressed desires may surface, and the combination of freedom and daring combine to allow physical actualization of these urges.

Yet, in the midst of all of the newly realized freedoms co-mingling and co-existing with the confidence, life at this age seems indeed quite simple. But in the midst of such bravado, the average young adult discovers that along with the pleasantries of existence, there are many emergencies, dilemmas, and difficulties that accompany life that may lead to a series of crisis situations.

One such crisis confronting the individual in the twenties is the realization that the criteria required for adulthood previously envisioned as a child, is almost impossible to accomplish. Often as young adults, the individual does not fit into the picture of oneself as imagined as a child. One must then re-interpret oneself as

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<sup>14</sup>George E. Vaillant, *Adaptation to Life*: (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1997), 330.

either inadequate or, as described by Gould, a counterfeit adult.<sup>15</sup> Introspection and life situations contrast and differentiate between the idea of what I am and what I think I am. Often these two conceptualizations do not correspond. Psychological and perhaps spiritual difficulties often arise. These perplexities may intensify, because at this age it is normative for individuals to think that there is only one way to do things. When life and life's consequences, or perhaps even the thoughts, desires, and actions of the involved individual do not conform to prior conceptions, crises invariably ensue. Such crises, eventually, without the benefit of positive intervention, and without proper spiritual guidance, lead to situation of rebellion, often against religion, and even against God.

The young adult naturally encounters many difficulties as daily life progresses. Percival M. Symonds writes that these temporary difficulties can be traced to the presence of adolescent fantasy. He states that the adolescent, as do individuals of other age groups, frequently fantasizes. Adolescent fantasizing is unique, because it usually occurs

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<sup>15</sup>Gould, 89.

without the presence of reality testing. When the average individual reaches the life stage where reality assessment becomes an important part of the thought process, life and existence without proper guidance may possibly become disillusioning.<sup>16</sup> William F. Kraft labels this time of life and state of mind as the "desert of discovery." It is a time when one confronts oneself and radically re-evaluates the meaning of life. Adolescent values come into question, and in some instances new values evolve. Everything, everyone, including oneself, becomes subject to question. Fulfilling objects and situations found in the recent past may now lose meaning. Questions now take the place of etched-in-stone antecedent answers. New methods to affirm one's identity are now necessary. Which components of life are really important? What are the proper modes and actions for the future? Am I prepared to deal with my indecisiveness? How can I be adequate in my relationships in the midst of states of personal confusion? William Kraft

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<sup>16</sup>Percival M. Symonds, *From Adolescent to Adult* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 198-99.

asks perhaps the most pertinent question: "How does one choose to act."<sup>17</sup>

This stage of life usually presents the perplexing conflict between morals and mores. Often, morality taught in the home and church conflicts with contemporary mores that are quite different. Moral practices in vogue at new surroundings sometimes diametrically oppose previous values. Kraft discovered that most young adults find it difficult to maintain moral integrity when their subculture, reference group, or community holds moral values that differ from those previously taught and embraced. Kraft further states that it takes courage and conviction to live by one's standards in such situations--regardless of the presence or absence of environmental support.<sup>18</sup> Exposure to different standards of and adherence to moral and ethical conduct without proper preparation and guidance generates internal pressure that may turn into crisis situations.

This is a part of the perplexing picture that invariably confronts all young adults, especially young African-American adults who have had prior exposure to

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<sup>17</sup>Kraft., 25-27.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 17.

Christianity. Guilt, for some individuals, derived from personal assessments of imagined or actual transgressions, inevitably becomes a factor. Such problems for young adults, strengthened by the inefficiency of the current environmental situation, and through the influence of significant others, presents new challenges. These conditions provide a fertile potential for the degradation, or even the eradication, if only temporarily, of faith, belief, and frequent practice in Christian activities.

The late teens and early twenties usually precipitate questions about religion. Some individuals become quite critical of religious institutions, the practices of religious institutions, as well as those who are part of religious institutions at all levels. Young adults are usually critical of phoniness, double standards, and ready-made solutions. Some become agnostic and doubt everything. Kraft ventures to say that the truth is really that most young people actually want religion's touch. Their desires are experiential rather than just theoretical. Their conscious as well as subconscious desires yearn for fulfillment by love, rather than through ideas.<sup>19</sup> At this

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 18.



time in life, even in light of outwardly expressed objections, "hands on" approaches and considerations are inwardly desired.

In conjunction with the criticism of religion, many young adults often question notions of God. Many take the position that life can indeed be meaningful without a transcendent God. An ideology that life and life's meaning is totally in the hands of the individual sometimes develops. Religion and God become a "dead" issue for some young adults. Herein lies the capacity for crises. Kraft effectively evaluates the situation. He writes, "Humans must at all cost continue the process of questioning. The entirety of humanity regardless of age, or social status, becomes seriously damaged when pursuit of truth ceases."<sup>20</sup> Too often, religion and religious activity, previously an important part of the young adult's existence, is abruptly severed and ostracized by the disposal mechanisms of the thought processes. The church must be aware of this possibility.

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<sup>20</sup>Gould, 89.

Young adults in America find themselves immersed in an abundance of social and cultural difficulties which they assess solely from their limited experiential perspective. Solutions to problems, and stability where uncertainties and difficulty arise, depends on prior preparation. Almost all contemporary American young adults grown up in a society that provides unclear value systems as models. This time of life then becomes ripe for crises. With the demise of previously existent family structures, the negativity of this situation is intensified. Among the benefits derived from the development of strong value systems are the abilities to constructively explore and criticize. Exploration, criticism, and self-examination are important components of life. Even the Christian religion, ideally, is open for examination. Avenues of dialogue must be kept open. Dialogue is perhaps the most important component associated with growth. The absence of dialogue leaves one to one's self! Prolonged presence in this state can lead to isolationism and narcissism.

Daniel J. Livenson et al. perhaps best appraise the parameters of potential crises that confront those leaving post-adolescence and approaching adulthood. They identify a

developmental bridge of transition between these two periods of life. They see separation from the family of origin, usually accomplished at several levels and intensities, as a significant component. This separation may occur in stages until total physical detachment exists. When this point in life becomes a reality, ideally it brings at least some economical and emotional independence. Livenson views the formation of a basis for living in the adult world as the other major task of this transition period. The individual must translate ambiguous hopes and fantasies about the future into a more clearly defined option, and devise firm choices. Each "marker" event that occurs during this period can have a crucial effect on the emerging life of young adults.<sup>21</sup> The church must become involved in these states of progression, and effect decisions that accompany the choices of their young adult population.

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<sup>21</sup>Daniel J. Levinson, et al., *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 73-78.

An obvious area to be considered is the potential for crisis for young adults as they enter the work world. Lessons not learned by the individual in previous decades, as it pertains to work habits and work attitudes, now become crucial factors. The ability to sustain oneself and one's family is dependent on prior preparation. Expertise or the lack of such in domestic obligations and difficulties are formed during the young adult years. Relationships take on new and more complex meanings during this period. Often there is a deficiency in the moral, intellectual, or spiritual maturity level that inhibits reaching out to others. Perhaps there exists an inability in the consciousness of the young adult, actual or conceived, to properly associate with others. As a result, distress and consternation often become a reality.

These are possible crises that exist for the African American young adult. The quest for a viable solution to this dilemma is a formidable task for the African American Church.

## CHAPTER 5

## Theological Affinity

Lost Sheep, Lost Coin

Are there any clear-cut directives within the scriptures that indicate that the church should be concerned with absences of individuals or groups? Does the African American Church have a scriptural "charge" to seek and reclaim missing constituents? In the opinion of this writer, there are two parables in the 15th chapter of Luke that clearly attest to this ecclesiastical responsibility. They are the Parable of the Lost Sheep, and the Parable of the Lost Coin.

What is Jesus' ultimate objective in the usage of The Parable of the Lost Sheep and The Parable of the Lost Coin? How were (are) the readers/hearers of these stories to comprehend their meanings, and properly integrate that essence into their consciousness and life related situations? John Philip McMurdo Sweet feels that in both of these parabolic sagas, the ultimate goal is to reveal the value and dignity that affords each "little one" in God's

Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Young adults, because of traditional positioning, may not be as valued as other ecclesiastic components. Such reasoning has the potential to situate them as the "little ones."

Both of these biblical stories have an overarching theme of lostness. In both scenarios, valuable goods are lost. A vast majority of contemporary individuals are familiar with the existence of valuable commodities. Losing precious goods is also a part of composite human existence. Keys, wallets, purses, buttons, contact lenses, and at times items of clothing are lost. Commercial enterprises have arisen to trace and recover lost children and missing relatives. Hair, hearing, sight, and one's physique are often lost with the passage of time. Even in death, the term "lost" is often used to soften the impact of permanent physical separation. Yet, in spite of its consistent presence, complete awareness of the consequences of being lost is at times never fully comprehended. I propose that for the African American Church, the departure of an increasing number of young adults represent a state of being lost and lostness.

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<sup>1</sup>John Phillip McMurdo Sweet, "A Saying, a Parable, a Miracle," *Theology* 76 (March 1973): 125-33.

It could accurately be pointed out that lostness is the objective of the more familiar Parable of the Prodigal Son. The parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin are more applicable for this situation because their approach to the solution of the dilemma. I hold that the image of the Parable of the Prodigal (the image of the father figure) is passive, and that passivity at this time in relationship to this issue is not acceptable. Action is what is now required and action and concern are the objective of the Lost Coin and the Lost Sheep parables.

Each parable exhibits revolutionary approaches to, and treatments of lost goods. The question put forth by Jesus in each instance seems to be paradoxical. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus began by saying, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it?"<sup>2</sup> One particular issue arises in this story. Is it feasible to leave the majority of the flock to retrieve a solitary minority? Why is it so important to be aware of every single representative of the flock (community)? Could Jesus have

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<sup>2</sup>Luke 15:3, A.V.

seen that any single deduction from the whole, occurring repeatedly, would eventually have devastating results.

The Parable of the Lost Coin involves a similar theme. Value is placed on what is considered to be a minute loss. It is interesting that in this parable there is equal emphasis on activities of the both male and female genders. This parable immediately follows the conclusion of the Lost Sheep scenario, and begins with, "What woman of you...?" It follows the tradition of Jewish culture where males were in the public arena, while responsibility and empowerment was given to females in the home. As in the former parable, there is more than one of the subjects (sheep and coins). In each instance one is missing. In the case of the coin, William Pesch indicates that the Greek term, δραχμη is probably equal to the coin associated with this word, the denarius. A denarius was worth a day's pay for a common day laborer.<sup>3</sup> In both scenarios, there is the loss of one. Both feature a preponderance of the original amount remaining. Why, then, does Jesus place such great emphasis on the retrieval of such a small portion of the total?

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<sup>3</sup>William Pesch, "δραχμη," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1: 353-54.



It should be noted that in these parables the shepherd and the woman are active agents in the quest for retrieval of lost goods. I suggest that these actions reflect metaphorically that the African American Church, in relationship to this issue, must also be active agents in the retrieval of valuable goods that are presently lost or in danger of being lost. Both parables contain endeavors of retrieval initiated in quest of what is missing. Joy is experienced in both cases upon recovery. Why are these quests for the lost so necessary?

In the case of the Lost Sheep, the value of the sheep is one of the essential elements to be considered. Jeremais notes that in ratio with what remained (one to ninety-nine), what is lost appears to be of little value. One can easily see that by and through the actions of both the shepherd and the woman that they valued what was lost. They realized, regardless of the fact that what was lost was considered of little value monetarily, still that amount was valuable. If the shepherd and the woman realized the value of what was lost, then how much more would God be concerned with the smallest most minute loss in relationship to humankind? Jeremais recognizes the fact that found this parable is the

ironic observation that what may be of little value to humans is of high value to God.<sup>4</sup> Brandon B. Scott sees in both the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin stories, a parallel. This parallel illustrates the theme of deprivation to restoration. One individual possesses one-hundred sheep, the other ten coins. Both suffer a loss. One goes after, the other searches. Both are found. Both rejoice!<sup>5</sup> I propose that the African American Church, has suffered losses in their young adult constituency. These parables indicate that it is imperative that the church take actions of retrieval.

An outstanding characteristic of the Lost Coin is the extreme physical activity of the woman. The loss is apparently her fault. Unlike the shepherd who is an innocent party to the loss, the woman is directly if not intentionally involved. She is diligent and persistent in her search. Jeremais has a vivid account of her activities. "She lights a candle, not because it is night, but because

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<sup>4</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, tran. S. H. Hooke, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 134.

<sup>5</sup>Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 7.

the low door lets very little light into the miserable, windowless dwelling, and she 'sweeps the house' with a palm-twig because in the dark a broom may make the coin tinkle on the floor."<sup>6</sup>

### Theological Conceptualizations

Theological concepts can be discovered when one associates the principles of these scenarios with the working of the Kingdom of God. God's character is exhibited in the example of what may be deemed inconsequential, or of little value to humanity is of value to God. The "paradoxical dimension" is observable at this juncture.

It is important to remember that these parables are preceded in the scripture by the objection of the powers-that-be, the Pharisees and the Scribes, objecting to Jesus' propensity to associate with those who the prevailing culture considered "sinners." Jesus' reply (riposte) is to reveal again the true nature of the Kingdom of God. This concern and revelation is thematic throughout Jesus' teaching.

William R. Herzog sees God in the roles of both the shepherd and the woman. Those who have fallen are

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<sup>6</sup>Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 135.

allegorically the lost sheep and coin. Herzog labels this selective, incomplete, inconsistent, highly selective kind of allegory as "theology."<sup>7</sup> Jesus' choice to associate male and female directly with what is Godly, elevates what could have been common historical occurrences, to lofty theological directives that are also applicable today. In the opinion of Bernard Brandon Scott, the English word parable is a transliteration of the Greek word *parabole*. *Parabole* is also closely associated with the Hebrew word *marshal*.<sup>8</sup> The essence of these parables illustrates that any sensible individual would search for lost items, whether their value is monetary or sentimental. What is different, is the concern for that which is not equated as valuable--is indeed valuable. Any loss, especially human loss, is not inconsequential.

Are the occurrences and results of these stories relevant today? Three noted experts on parables, Adolph Julicher, C. H. Dodd, and Jeremais represent a tradition of scholarship that has taken the parables to be expressions of

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<sup>7</sup>William R. Herzog, II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 11-12.

<sup>8</sup>Scott, 8.

theology and ethics in story form.<sup>9</sup> They postulate that the primary task of interpretation is to bridge the apparent gap that separates the story of the parable from the discourse it was clearly intended to generate. Discourses of the parable are only important in establishing the theological or ethical correlation usable in contemporary situations.<sup>10</sup>

It is within these parameters that I find correlation with the present dilemma of the increasing absence of young adults from the African American Church. There are, in my opinion, relevant points in relationship to the issue. They are:

1. Are young adults of value to the African American Church? Perhaps because in some situations, young adults fail to significantly support the church financially, or because they are not a potent force in church politics, young adults are easily overlooked. Because of the lack of substantial young adult financial support or due to the lack of them being potent forces in church politics, young adults may be deemed to be expendable.

2. Are young adult lost because of their own actions? It may be concluded that young adults are lost because of

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<sup>9</sup>Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 135.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

the actions of the young adults themselves (as in the Lost Sheep). Therefore, emphasis should be focused on those young adults remaining in the flock (congregation).

3. Is departure from the church at this age to be expected? Many individuals (within and without the church) believe that at this age departure from the church is to be expected. To remain in the fold is in the minds of many the exception, rather than the rule. Therefore, the church should be patient, pray for their welfare in their absence, accurately attributed to how portions of the African American Church react to the dilemma. I propose that: Theologically young adults are:

A. Theologically young adults are: Identifiable with the Lost Sheep. They stray from the fold for different reasons. Allegorically, the church must associate itself with the concerned shepherd (God). We must leave the ninety and nine (after establishing parameters for their safety) and go after the one that is the lost sheep regardless of the reason for them being lost. This action correlates with the purpose of these parables. This is a clearly a scriptural directive.

B. Some factions of the African American Church could profit from the important theological lessons in the Parable of the Lost Coin. Portions of the comprehensive church membership, especially young adults, have departed or are presently in the process of leaving. Allegorically, they are identifiable with both being absent and of being lost. The present condition of absent young adults from the African American Church is equivalent to the lostness as depicted in both parables. There is an affinity between the present situation and the lost parables.

C. The African American Church shares partial responsibility for the items (young adults) being lost. One reason may be the lack of interest in young adult problems. Another may be the absence of programs geared to young adult life, and failure to respond to new subtleties of contemporary society. From a theological perspective, upon realization of the problem, it is important that the church be concerned. Without corrective measures, the church will lose more young adults than it can attract.

The African American Church must be cognizant of the fact that it is suffering a loss. As in the Parable of the Lost Coin, these losses are partially occurring within the

"house." There are too many instances where due to the lack of programs, concern, and action, young people are essentially lost in terms of church membership status. They are as the lost coin, "lost in the house,"

As in this parable, there should, in fact, must be, a diligent search within the house to discover who is really lost. Means of prevention should be sought for those young adults who are at risk. Mechanisms of redemption should be generated for those young adults who have left. Programs of evangelism for those young adults who never belonged are the obligation of the church's mission.

The absent young adult has value. The absent young adult has a place and responsibility in the African American Church. The absent young adult should be diligently searched out, preserved, retrieved, and reclaimed. This is what Jesus wants us to understand about the workings of the Kingdom of God. This is the theology of the Parable of the Lost Sheep and of the Lost Coin. This is a modern challenge for the African American Church.



## CHAPTER 6

### Voices

Each culture possesses a mentality or mentalities. Sociologists suggest that each community has an unseen ethos, a spiritual dimension that perpetually prevails and influences its thoughts and actions. Each issue confronting a specific group of people is derived from multi-faceted sources. There may be a formulated consensus, but there often remain diversified ideologies on each and all issues. These different opinions serve as composites that undergird the general ethos of the community. I have chosen to label these undercurrents voices.

Often there develops within a subculture, a subaltern of that subculture. These groups may form on the basis of differences such as age, sex, or mutual interest. It is the supposition of this work that there exists among the African American subculture in the United States an additional subculture arising from the mutuality found in age.

Communal voices are varied in nature. They are static in some areas and at the same time dynamic in others. They are built on different experiences and conditions. Voices reflect such circumstances as age, sex, religious beliefs, and social/economic status. The first step in comprehending the "vibes" of any given community, on any given issue

requires one to make a conscious effort to seek out, and listen to the voices of that community. Often one hears the forceful vocal utterances, yet equally important are the unspoken and unsolicited expressions. The objective of this chapter is to seek out, hear, and listen to all inflections, regardless of status. All expressions and thoughts on the matter are of importance. The methodology will be to introduce and interview the subjects, and to catalogue, analyze, and assess, the statistics gathered.

### Voices--Pastors and Church Leaders

Interviews were conducted with pastors and religious leaders from the majority of denominations of the African American Church. Efforts were made and invitations extended to all included faith communities. The results are:

#### Church of God In Christ (COGIC)

Pastor Ronald William Harris Jr. of the New Light Baptist Church, located on Maie Avenue in Los Angeles, represents both the Baptist and Church of God in Christ denominations. He possesses dual ordinations in these faith communities and has served in the capacity of pastor in both denominations. Harris in this survey will serve as the representative for the Church of God in Christ.

Reverend/Elder Harris has served at New Light for approximately nine months. His investigation reveals that

there have been losses of young adults at this church over the years. During his tenure alone, he estimates that there has been a 20 per cent loss. In his previous tours of duty at Churches of God in Christ, he has found that the same loss of young adults also exists in that denomination.

To combat this loss, since he has been pastor at New Light Baptist Church, new ministries have been initiated. There is now a "singles" ministry in operation with the objective of having a place for dialogue and communion for unmarried youth. The church has also begun to record absenteeism among this age group and then use telephone inquiry or written correspondence as follow-up mechanisms. Pastor Harris feels that the church must be better equipped to deal with contemporary issues. He envisions a drug prevention/intervention program and classes on parenting as absolutely necessary for young adults. Education, with an emphasis on education from the biblical/spiritual perspective, in his opinion, will assist in the transitional dilemmas. The most profound message garnered from this interview is that Pastor Harris feels that the church has shown a propensity to be resistant to change in relationship to this issue. It is imperative that the church become more contemporary in its methodology. "We are too tradition bound. There must be a medium, we must discover/uncover

ways to change without throwing out tradition. The church as a whole is locked by its nature into tradition", Harris forcefully proclaims. He concludes the interview with this message. "As a whole we are not willing to change, it is important that we still convey the same *message* of the gospel, but it is time to update and change the *method*."

#### Bethel United Holy Church of UnSpeakable Joy

This church is pastored by the Reverend Carol Houston. It is located on Central Avenue in Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> Statistics reveal that from 1975 to 1985 the church lost one-third (from ninety to sixty) of its young adults. The figure from 1985 to 1995 was forty-one per cent (from sixty to thirty five). Since 1995, there has been a rise of fourteen percent (from thirty-five to forty). Pastor Houston states that when she became pastor in 1995 one of her main goals was to stem the tide of departure. Bethel improved or instituted such ministries as music, education, dance, ushers, and food service. Innovative ministries such as a ministry embracing mime, additional security, and modernized vehicles for publicity were deemed necessary and possible.

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<sup>1</sup>Bethel United Holy Church of UnSpeakable Joy is unique in the fact that Pastor Houston's paternal grandmother, the late Reverend Daisy Houston, was the organizer and pastor. She was followed as pastor at Bethel by her son Bishop Ralph Houston. Pastor Carol Houston is the daughter of Pastor Ralph Houston. Three generations of Houstons have pastored Bethel.

These changes came about because of the recognition of the drastic young adult loss, and from discussions by the congregation of that loss. The ultimate result of these discussions is what is known around Bethel as *Reverend Ministries*. Pastor Houston feels that the church can be of assistance in the traumatic transitional period from adolescence to young adulthood by establishing mentors. The vision is that mentors will serve as buffers and advisors at the critical times in life. Pastor Houston also utilizes a basic principle of pastoral care as a tool. The ideal of being available (being there) is the exemplar of the church in general and is the goal of the individual member. Houston recommends that the church spend time with and in the concerns of the young adult.

African Christian Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.)

Reverend Leslie R. White is pastor of Grant A.M.E Church of Los Angeles, California. This faith community is located on Central Avenue in the South Central sector of Los Angeles. Pastor White has been pastor since 1994. He reveals that Grant has not lost any young adult members, in fact, there has been substantial increase during his tenure. He declines to give a figure because of the lack of prior research on the matter. White proudly chronicles an

impressive list of programs at Grant for young adults, which include:

1. An improved version of the Young Adult Choir with the acceptance of the "hip-hop" style of singing.
2. Field trips for the youth and young adults of the church.
3. Celebration of young "womanhood" and "manhood".
4. The placement of young adults, regardless of gender, in positions of authority, not just "token" or positions at disadvantages in regard to age (i. e., one young adult to 15 older individuals). Rather positions that are based on ability, interest, and guidance of the Spirit.
5. An annual youth and young adult revival, where these age groups are in reasonable control (attendance is consistently over six hundred for each revival service).
6. A vibrant support ministry; this is a mentor program.
7. Educational classes in the summer, Vacation Bible School and a Summer Day Camp.
8. Computer training classes.
9. A *SISTAH TO SISTAH*<sup>2</sup> program for young adult women.
10. Scouts troops, both male and female.
11. Week-long focus seminars (on contemporary problems).
12. Monthly exploratory meetings.

White is emphatic in his answer to the question of whether the proliferation of drugs, gangs, etc., in the community has contributed to the decline of young adult attendance. He deals with it from two perspectives. (1) From the social perspective, he reluctantly agrees with the premise, but quickly adds that he is not a sociologist. (2) From the biblical perspective he believes that if a church

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<sup>2</sup>This is a special program for youth and young adult females. Its title is a play on the colloquial pronunciation of "sister."

has suffered a decline in young adult ministry, then that church is not properly doing its ministry or God's will. He feels that the abundant presence of drugs, gangs, or any other negative situation is not the cause, rather it is the consequence of the church not doing its job. The church must be radical in the realm of life improvement efforts. In Pastor White's thinking, there exists in modernity an unhealthy challenge to soften, rather than to listen to and obey the gospel. White believes that misinterpretation and misappropriation of the "word" has become too often the reality. Some churches have fallen into what he labels as an *underground economy*. He uses as an example the scenario of Jesus where the Pharisees deem it proper to rescue the ox from the well on the Sabbath (Luke 14: 5), because of the monetary value to them of the ox. At the same time they deem the healing of the withered hand to be wrong and against the law essentially because there is no personal gain inherent for them. The moment that the gospel is misappropriated for economic or other reasons, the church loses its effectiveness and power, he contends. He concludes this excellent homily with a challenge/question, "Why should God bless--what is not properly functioning?" He quotes a scripture from Isaiah (34:15), and correlates the place

mentioned in this scripture as applicable to the spaces occupied by ineffective churches.

There shall the owl nest and lay hatch and brood in its shadow. There to the vultures shall gather.

White's hermeneutic indicates that God will allow death to come to a non-functioning church or denomination so that life in the form of a functioning church or denomination will be born in its place.

White see as a change for the church, the necessity of proactive involvement. He quotes from the Charles Wesley hymn, "A Charge to Keep I Have," as a rallying cry. He also resolutely emphasizes that the church *must* allow another generation to make their "offering" to God. Their offering may differ from previous generations, but these offerings are of no less importance.

The church can assist in the transition from adolescence to young adulthood by returning to the biblical directive of "older women" counseling the "younger women" concept. There is, in his opinion, a gross reduction of mentoring in the African American community, as well as in the church. This situation has been traditionally an integral part of African American life. It has been, for many reasons, denigrated in recent times. For this clergy person, there is a dire need to return to these principles.



The church can assist in its implementation. The church must also stress more firmly the need for Christian religious education. More godly inspired, and church run institutions of the elementary level are now needed. In the past, some denominations had a zeal for, and eagerly supported, higher education (colleges). Because of the current crisis, the church must reach out to children at the ages of three and four. This is the age that involvement by the church will prove to be most effective. These early endeavors will reap a reward for the church in the future lives of its youth.

Pastor White concludes the interview with a poignant plea. "The church must work harder with its men." There is presently an absence of males in the collective church at all age levels. Controversies are now raging in many churches and denominations over women as Clergy persons. White feels that women will have to serve, because there are not now, or in the foreseeable future, enough men to fill all of the positions. He points out that the church stands in a very peculiar position. The African American Church, in relationship to gender equality, can be either a *paradigm* or a *paradox*. We now have the opportunity to set a positive God-inspired example for the world to follow, or we can

close our eyes to reality and to the true concepts of the will of God.

Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.)

The Reverend Will Sims is an Associate Minister and former Assistant Pastor of the Hays Tabernacle C.M.E. Church of South Los Angeles. He has been a member of this faith community for most of his life, and has been in the ministry for over twenty years. Since 1985, Sims estimates that fifty per cent of the young adults of the church have been lost for various reasons.

Hays Tabernacle has no new ministries in existence for young adults, but their traditional activities include a youth adult choir, a Sunday School class, and periodical recreational field trips. There has been, according to Sims, discussions about implementing new programs and ministries, but as of now none has eventuated. Reverend Sims definitely feels the secular influences such as gangs, drugs, and lessened job opportunities have contributed to young adult decline. He is quick to add that these situations have also caused a decline in other ages. He gives this example. Older Christians are afraid to venture out after dark in the community. As a result many night services have been eliminated. Sims recommends that the

church pray and seek better and more police involvement to abate the dangers.

Sims feels that the role of the church takes many dimensions. There is a job placement ministry active at Hays, as well as other self-help agencies. He feels that the church would be more effective if the church, in its entirety, would venture out into the community. A massive show of force would focus attention on the problem and exhibit to those in the community that the church cares.

This minister feels that the family is first responsible for preparing children for life, and for any problems in life, including all of the passages of life. Yet, he feels that the church has a lifelong obligation to teach and to train its children to be God fearing parents. "Good homes, he states, will produce good children; good Christian homes, will produce good Christian children."

Sims feels that the church should take strides to strengthen those young adults within its fold. He verbalizes an axiom that relates to this portion of the issue. "Sheep get sheep," he says. This means that if you strengthen what you have, what you have (strengthened young adult Christians) will draw peers. The church's job is to be very sure that the sheep are properly "fed." Fed with God-inspired instructions and immense portions of the true

gospel. He ends the interview with this admonishment.

"When sheep are not properly fed, they will leave the fold."

#### New Light Baptist Church

The Reverend David Morgan is the pastor of the New Light Baptist Church located on Twenty-second Street in Los Angeles. He has been pastor for over a year. Pastor Morgan previously served in positions relating to young adults at his home church (Welcome Baptist) for fifteen years. He states that New Light has experienced an approximate twenty per cent loss of its young adult members directly prior to and during his administration. The church has implemented ministries of evangelism, computer classes, and a renewed emphasis of Christian education (Church School) as deterrents to young adult membership reductions. Pastor Morgan feels that drugs, gangs, and attractions from secular lifestyles have affected young adult attendance and participation in church. More constructive involvement by the church and elevations in values beginning in the home, and within the family, through the influence of the church, will combat this problem he emphasizes. The role of the church in this procedure is to return to God and to Godly principles.

The church must be willing to change and advance with the times. The church must stay abreast of positive

changes. It cannot compete at all if it insists on living entirely in yesterday, are admonishments offered by Morgan. Pastor Morgan envisions that New Light will grow spiritually as well as numerically. He concludes with words of encouragement for the church in general, "Continue to trust in God" is his plea.

#### Metropolitan Baptist Church

The Reverend Tyrone Skinner is the pastor of the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Altadena California. He began his pastorship in August of 1990. Pastor Skinner offers to the interviewer the uniqueness of the demographics of Metropolitan. Of the over six hundred on the membership role, the mean age is fifty. On his arrival there were very few young adults present. He further offers the startling statistic, that since he has been pastor he estimates that there has been an eight-five per cent decrease in young adult attendance and membership. Programs/ministries geared specifically to and for young adults are (1) young adult ministry, and (2) young adult Bible study. Skinner has the belief that "likes" attract "likes." To this end, Metropolitan is attempting to attract more young adults into its membership.

Recently there was a special meeting with those who chose to remain at Metropolitan, to investigate and

comprehend what "attracts" and what "repels." One result of these session was for the church to examine the feasibility of involving the church in some type of athletic activity for both genders. It is felt that it is difficult for young adults to just "sit." Physical activity seems to be a key to at least some form of contentment.

Pastor Skinner agrees that recent social conditions such as gangs, drugs, lack of employment, etc., are circumstances that add to the problem. He also sees other reasons. These reasons lie within the structure, thought process, and actions of the church. He feels that young adults have to made to realize that they are part of the equation. Young adults expect more than "lip service." They should be included in positions of authority and involved in decision making processes. Worship disciplines, in fairness, should also include at least some their interests.

In regard to suggestions, Pastor Skinner believes in tradition, even labels himself as a traditionalist. Yet new vehicles must be discovered to convey the tradition. Evangelism must remain, but it is imperative to uncover new methods to evangelize. There has to be more aggressive marketing of the gospel and the church. The message needs to be transportable.

Such changes as a relaxation of the dress code, additional worship styles, and communication are now in order. Pastor Skinner emphasizes communication, and cautions that *dialogue* is the objective, not *monologue*. He feels that older Christians, through experience, bring to the table wisdom, which young people must accept and embrace. Conversely, younger Christians offer new ideas and zeal, whose unbiased reception by older Christian is also desirable.

Pastor Skinner's vision is for the church to move from what seems to be a static state of *inertia* and move into the mode of *mobility*.

Skinner adds that it is his premise that locale and environmental factors also affect young adult attendance. He feels that because of the many secular activities in the Southern California region, there is less young adult church participation here than in other regions.

He cautions that the church must not fall into the fallacy of longevity, i. e., God's word, and the church will endure. There is no assurance that individual churches or individuals enjoy this promise. He feels that now is the time that the church *attack* this problem, not deal with it, but *attack* it. This situation, in itself is depressing, but for Skinner what lies ahead for the African American Church,

without increased young adult participation, is potentially more disastrous. The current absence of the young adult is definitely, in his opinion, weakening the overall church. Yet, the consequences that lie in the future is more frightening. It is time to wipe out the inertia and move on to mobility.

The unspoken consensus of these Clergypersons appears to be that they understand the intent and ideology of the Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin. They have realized that something has been, and is being lost. They have taken steps to search, and to retrieve what some have deemed of little value. In some instances, there is an outward expression of joy. The task for this project is to extend this realization and outreach endeavor.

#### Voices--Young Adults Who Remain in Church

The surveys were conducted in and derived from three dimensions; college campuses, individuals on the street, shopping malls, and other venues. The age categories of the subjects were designed to represent three stages of young adulthood, early (eighteen to twenty-one), mid (twenty-one to twenty-five), and late (twenty-five to thirty). Originally the goal was to obtain fifteen responses from each category. This number would be sufficient to provide an adequate sampling of thinking in relationship to the issue.



Later, at the suggestion of project advisors, it was decided that a round number of fifty will be more desirable.

Consequently, this survey has fifty respondents from within the church, and fifty from those young adults not in the church.

The results of this survey shed light on the inner dimensions of this issue. Trends were quickly discovered. It was found that among those young adults that remain in the church the overwhelming majority (eighty-seven per cent) have been part of the church for most of their lives. They are part of family worship practices. They are recipients of religious culture. These groups share a common reality. For them, God, and church are family oriented experiences.

Among those who are not in church at the present time, the majority (seventy-nine per cent) state that they had little or no association with church activity as a child. For this group, there is not a family oriented relationship as far as church and worship experience are concerned. The emphasis is more on the individual and the needs of the individual.

Almost unanimously, the reply to the question of young adults in the church as to why they have maintained continued attendance in church was that they find spiritual enrichment/guidance. Additionally, the fellowship

dimension, as well as a love for God are significant factors.

"What issues does your church dialogue or explore that is pertinent to the interests and needs of young adults" was a major inquiry of this project. The replies were varied. Approximately fifty per cent reveal that their churches are involved in dialogue concerning: sex, drugs, peer pressure, and problems arising from school and relationships. Another twenty five per cent disclosed that their faith community's concern has only been focused in the spiritual realm. The consensus seems to be that there should be at least some effort extended by the church to consolidate the issues of secular young adult life with that of spiritual existence. Another twenty five per cent either stated that this question is not applicable or left the question unanswered.

When asked to list three factors that effect the decline in young adult attendance in the church there were interesting, distressing, and discouraging answers. The most overwhelmingly prominent reply is that churches do not have relevant programs or activities that are geared toward young adults. Another important reason is the fact that young adults feel that older church members are too judgmental, too pious in their opinion. The feeling that the church and church leaders are corrupt, deceitful, and

overly financially motivated was also given. Other answers were: boring worship, irrelevant sermons, and misapplication of scripture by the church and church leaders for personal gain.

In reply to "How does your church satisfy you spiritually?", the most prevalent answer was through biblical exposure (education) to situations that were relevant to their lives. Quests for understanding the meaning of life and situations in life were equally represented. The fact that the church was able to exhibit the essence of Christian love was an intriguing answer given by perhaps one third of the respondents. One respondent stated that, "When I am about to fall, my church *grabs me!*"

Replies to the question of "What changes would cause you to attend church more often" are surprising. Over fifty per cent of the respondents, even in light of previous complaints, state that they attend regularly at the present time and that there are no changes necessary for their continued attendance. Of those offering opinions, the most often mentioned answer is that the church needs more activities geared to young adults. Such activities as peer groups, mentors, and educational ventures, dating seminars, and parenting classes were listed. Some respondents feel that there should be a relaxation in the dress code.

This group exhibit a well-developed level of Christian faith. It is apparent that they have been nurtured by the dictates of the tradition. Although they have disagreements with some of the practices of the church, they are determined to be conduits for positive change, from within the church. In the foreseeable future, there does not appear to be substantial departures from the church from this dedicated group.

#### Voices--Young Adults Who Are Not in Church

Of the fifty individuals answering the survey, two-thirds (thirty-three) stated that they never were members of a church. It is interesting to note that an equal number (thirty-two) reveal that there was no church involvement with them by their parents or guardians. Those that had attended church and attended on an infrequent basis stated that the major reason for attending was in quest of personal attainment of spirituality. Next listed was actually "nothing." These individual either attended church out of curiosity, or for a cultural/religious ritual such as a funeral or a wedding. In the minority of reasons were: love, knowledge, friendship, and a quest to make sense of life. Overwhelming, the type of worship exposure desired by those surveyed was an that of active, involved experience, rather than passive, contemplative activity.

In reply to the question, "What can the church do to increase your interest" came the following answers: to have more relevant programs (thirty-six percent); attention to young adult issues (ten per cent); and nothing, the church is fine as it is (ten per cent). Other answers such as the need for honesty, and no opinion/comment comprised the remaining answers.

To the inquiry of "What social factors prevent young adults from attending church" came these answers: hanging out and partying (forty-five per cent); irrelevant and boring worship (twenty-six per cent); and other answers such as restricted dress codes, activities planned conflicted with work schedules of young adults factored into consideration, and no replies.

The quality that distinguishes these respondents is their restlessness. They are at odds with much of what society and religion requires. They object in varying degrees to the presence of discipline. They are not as tied into tradition as their counterparts, who remain in the church. They are more individualistic, lacking the quality of family and community. Yet, most individuals in this group still are in need of that unnamed "something." Some label it peace; some peace of mind. Others, perhaps, from some religious exposure, label it spirituality.

Almost unanimously, the reply to whether these individuals would return or initiate church membership for the welfare of there children was in the affirmative. Additionally, almost in entirety, those surveyed felt that they were not properly prepared by family, church, school, or any other institution for the overwhelming trauma of transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood.

The survey also revealed that the majority of young adults, whether in or out of the church, have a common criticism of the church. They all state that the church does not possess a holistic comprehension of their unique needs, secular or spiritual. Other complaints include: the programs of the church are not relevant to current young adult issues. There is in the church, an over abundance of corruption and corrupt leaders. Young adult males are critical of the lifestyle or images projected by male clergy persons. Other complaints include the tendency of older Christians to denigrate the entire age group and the existence of restricted dress codes. Also high on the objection list is the denial of sincere dialogue, and the inability of young adults to become part of the decision-making mechanisms. The worship experience itself is a major area for disapproval. Many think that worship is boring, antiquated, and irrelevant.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

#### Assessment

Admittedly, the writer began this project with two basic assumptions. First, the assumption was that in recent years, there has been a loss in attendance and membership in the African American Church by young adults. This assumption was verified. It was also assumed that there exists a lack of both interest and effort by the church on circumstances relative to this issue. Surprisingly, surveys taken in this project proved this assumption to be partially, at least, unfounded.

Undergirding these assumptions was a personal opinion of the writer, that a major cause of absence from the African American Church by young adults is associated with the difficulty of the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. Research performed for this project uncovers the fact that transition dilemmas are present, they do present problems, but there are greater dilemmas for young adults. Transitional difficulties do exist. However, this particular issue is only one of the problems faced by young adults. It cannot be claimed to be the major cause of young adults leaving the African American Church.

Like all statistics, samplings or predictions, complete accuracy in this survey is impossible. Results are as representative of the general thought processes of African American Christian Church community as any other such endeavor.

The assessment began with the major "player" of this drama, the African American young adult. They are a group experiencing excessive growing pains. These difficulties, differ in nature, but evoke similar consternation as faced at the same age by prior generations. Physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual maturing processes are actively working in the individual during these years. These processes exist, as they existed in the past, in different ways, at different times, and to different degrees in all young adults. There are particular circumstances that confront current young adults that are unique.

Currently, American society exists in the clutches of highly advanced technology. In some circles the quality of, as well as success in life, becomes measurable through the lens of what one knows and how one utilizes what one knows. Convenience and instant availability become acceptable and aspired objectives in America. We live in "take-out" and "disposable" cultures. There are many advantages associated with how we currently live. Conversely, disadvantages also



exist. Because of what appears to be a disposal mentality, there has crept into the consciousness of individuals of all ages a trend and a desire to dispose of quickly and permanently many elements of our existence. Regretfully, included on some African American lists of disposals have been, and is church affiliation. Because of the absence of church activity in many African American parents (families) in the past two generations, a portion of today's young adults do not share in the legacy of the African American Church. They are deprived of what was commonplace for many older African Americans. Throughout the history of African Americans and their struggle for liberty and dignity, there has been a place, where the culture could find refuge and strength. There are now more African American families and individuals without church participation and affiliation.

The results of this survey validated the above premise. Families that had the church as part of their lives reveal a an interesting fact. The importance of involvement in church activity became a part of the thinking of their children. Additionally, children of parents involved in church and church activities remain in church at a much higher ratio, than the children of individuals who are not church members. Conversely, the survey reveals that a majority of young adults who do not attend church, did not

have church association as children in family oriented situations.

Reasons given for not attending church, or for not attending church more regularly, drew replies that revealed preferences for involvement in other activities. Some of these activities are "hanging out" and "partying." These activities for some are more desirable and pleasurable than what transpires in church. Others express the sentiment that church and church activities have never been part of their existence. It is something that others "do." Some have found satisfaction in other religious faiths, or other religious faiths are the in-place religious tradition and institution of their families.

The position of high esteem, held by the church in previous generations, seems at first glance to be in a state of erosion in the minds of a portion of current African American young adults.

Yet strangely, almost all of those surveyed (in or out of the church) still look to the church as a place to find essential spirituality. Replies such as, "I attend church for spiritual enrichment;" "I attend church to come closer to God," or "I went to church to try to make some sense of my life" are offered. This seems to be indicative of the fact that (1) the value and the mission of the church as a

place of "healing" is still in the consciousness of current young adults; and (2) young adults today are no different from any previous generation, they comprehend and seek spiritual guidance. Even in light of different situations and circumstances, somehow the African American Church remains a source for discovering inner peace.

Equally intriguing are the replies from leaders of the African American Church. The modest amount of respondents utilized in the survey limits comprehensive accuracy. Yet from the replies received, a general consensus of the thoughts of church leaders is apparent.

Almost all of those church leaders interviewed are cognizant of the fact that there is a loss of young adult attendance and membership. All have either given serious thought to the issue, have had discussions, or have initiated actions or intervention. If such actions are representative of the African American Church in general, they disprove the original assumption of this survey that the church is passive in relationship to this issue.

What is interesting is how the ramification of the issues has been comprehended and assessed theologically by those clergy persons interviewed. Pastor White's approach is quite unique. He, through faith and conviction, is able to boldly proclaim that the current condition is not the

cause, but the consequence of inactivity by the church. His congregation has undertaken bold measures to counteract this tendency. The result in this instance validates his convictions. Not only is Grant A.M.E. able to retain young adult parishioners, but Grant A.M.E. also brings in new young adults. There are many programs and ministries in this church geared directly to and for young adults. Some programs serve as evangelistic vehicles that has during Pastor White's tenure added substantially to Grant A.M.E.'s young adult population.

Conversely, due to the demographics and logistics, the situation at Metropolitan Baptist Church differs. Pastor Skinner faces a dilemma of incorporating young adults into a traditionally elderly faith community. In-built generational differences and apprehensive thinking become the first obstacle to overcome. Conscious conditioning of all concerned and the necessity for coexistence within the congregation here is the first order of business. Time, and patience is the course that Pastor Skinner has chosen to pursue. To initiate zealous evangelism in quest of young adults and young adult ministries forced upon senior congregates would without proper preparation would be disastrous for this congregation.

Pastor Houston has already made progress on her goals and ecclesiastical objectives. Statistics reveal that the trend of decline at Bethel has abated. Sufficient increases have materialized. Creative ministries and elementary forms of communal improvements such as security, because of the locale, and modernized methods of publicity are reaping positive results.

Pastors Harris and Morgan at the New Lights are in formative stages of action. They both seem to have a firm grip on reality. Attention to the existence of the problem is presently a reality in both churches. Procedures for eradication, or at least reducing the declines are now part of the strategies of these churches.

The situations at Hayes Tabernacle and others in the area are similar. The decline in young adult membership and participation not only affects the present conditions of these congregations, but continued absences will reap greater havoc in future years.

Church leaders are also cognizant of the "neo-enemies" or "competitors" that threaten churches via their young adult constituency. The presence and overall negative effect of gangs, drugs, "hanging out and partying" and quests for material possessions grieves these leaders. Yet, there is no discouragement or intimidation by the threat

that these factors present. There is a foundational faith exhibited in relationship to this issue that if the gospel is properly proclaimed and incorporated, these inconveniences are surmountable. The secret is to appropriate the power of the gospel to its fullest potential.

The consensus among these various denominations and congregations is that there is definitely a decline of young adults in the African American Church. Church leaders are aware of this trend and plans for combating this tendency are to varying degrees now in action.

#### Recommendations

This project has sought out, listened to, and heard the voices of African Americans involved in this issue. From the pulsations of community, arise recommendations. I will first direct recommendations to the church and church leaders. These suggestions are intended to assist in combating one of the problems facing the contemporary church.

It is advisable that first the church appraise its particular situation. It is imperative that churches and church leaders comprehend that churches are different in personality. All churches exist under the same general purpose, but subsist under different situations and

circumstances. Care should be taken in determining exactly what direction(s) is feasible for the involved church. Questions must be asked, such as; "What are the peculiarities of this congregation?"; "What are God's intentions for this assembly?"; "What is this church's uniqueness?"; "What quality renders this faith community different from others". Individual churches must resist the temptation of becoming without reason or justification, "replicas" of other programs. Successful programs and ministries can be imitated, but a wise pastor or church leader realizes that the particular situation of his or her congregation may differ.

Take time to observe, and become familiar with as much of the dynamics of the problem as possible. It is prudent to consult those with experience on the issue. Comprehend, as thoroughly as possible the involved individuals, the problems, and anticipate potential opposition that may arise to any proposed solution. Assess your resources, human, financial, and spiritual. Do not over-reach. Faith is necessary and commendable yet realism has its place.

Preservation of existing young adult membership should be the first objective. Before one begins, prayer and mediation are desired prerequisites. Pastor and church leaders should ideally first prepare themselves. Focused

prayer and contemplation are desirable. Ask God to direct actions.

The theological basis for this work is founded on the premise of "lostness." If church leaders, whether in congregational service or in academia, are bound by these directives, then corrective action becomes crucial.

Meditate over proven facts. Young adult members of the African American Church, similar to items important in the Parable of the Lost Coin, are already, in jeopardy of being lost. Even more depressing is the fact that some are already lost, they are "lost" within the confines of the "house" (church). It is crucial that we search for them, find them, restore them, and rejoice.

I must at this time be emphatic. The African American Church is faced with a dilemma. Ignoring the problem, or wishing for easy answers from heaven are not in order. The Church must roll up its collective sleeves and squarely confront, or even better attack existing and increasing young adult absences. "Yesterday" and tradition are fine in their place. The legacy of Dred Scott, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King teaches the important lesson on confronting the issue at hand.



I foresee even more losses for the collective church in future generations, if the departure of youth and young adults is not abated. Children of current young adults are not being socialized into traditional African American Church culture. Strength of any organism is inherently contained in the well-being of the producing component. Without production, all living living entities perish. I recommend strongly that the church take steps to revitalize one of its important structures.

I recommend that measures be taken to include and involve those individuals remaining within the church community in positions of authority. Utilize their strengths. Encourage their enthusiasm, while prudently channeling their energies. I recommend that the church recognize the increasing departures and absences of this age group. Investigate why these departures and absences occur. I recommend more intensive ventures of evangelism specifically directed to and at young adults. I challenge the African American Church to involve itself in this quest. I confront the church with this challenge. "Is the power of the gospel diminished?" "Does not the gospel have same power it did when Peter preached after the Day of Pentecost? Are we as leaders of the church anyless conveyors of the gospel message than was Peter or John? Are gangs, gang

mentality, rock cocaine, and other contemporary situations more powerful than what we preach?" I challenge both scholars and congregational theologians to be part of the attack force.

Search out and encourage young adults to express their inner-most feelings. Perhaps it would be feasible to organize others to assist in this endeavor. Scholars and theologians must unite. Learn to listen, but beyond listening, learn to hear. Hear what is being verbalized. Hear what is not being verbalized. Do not depend on memory. Codify these utterances. File them. Refer to them. One of the most important lessons learned in this survey is that even in the consciousness of young adults not involved in the church there is still a quest for some type of spiritual enrichment. Young adults are desperately seeking something. They almost unanimously are in search for enrichment that can not be found in the present society.

Confer with the older Christian members of the community. Create dialogues on the issues. Remember Pastor Skinner's advice, create a dialogue, not a monologue. Seek out fears. Make an effort to explore any opposition that may exist. Attempt to determine if there exists any resentment or antagonism and determine the source. Inquire from both sectors what programs or ministries should be

feasibly implemented by the church. What resistance is there for the inclusion of young adults into church polity. If such apprehensions exist, bring them to the surface.

It is apparent, at least to the surveyor, that in reality, antithetical to one of the original assumptions of this work, some pastors and church leaders are well aware of the problem. They have already begun actions by the church to counteract this trend. Some faith communities have had excellent success. The hope is that through this project, this issue has been accurately assessed in regard to content and provides some suggestions for solutions.

Be aware that there are two potentially devastating dispositional stages that many young adults experience. Recognize the presence of confidence. Be slow to think badly of, denigrate, or suppress this stage of human development. Utilize the energy that it generates. Allow it to build positive fires within the church community. Realize that in the mid-to-late twenties, there may emerge a feeling of dissatisfaction with life and personal accomplishments that may border on depression. Develop the expertise to recognize the symptoms. Have in place church resources that can be beneficial to the individual. One-on-one mentors are very effective tools. Be prepared for the onset of both of these occurrences in young adult life.

Inquire from both sectors what programs or ministries the church should feasibly implement to strengthen young adult presence and participation. Arrange meetings with all concerned parties. Form ways and means committees to determine what directions are advisable.

This survey reveals that young adults still look primarily to churches as vessels unto spirituality. The church then has a need to mobilize those vehicles within its structure that convey spirituality. Young adults are also seeking programs and ministries that are relevant to their particular problems. Problems mentioned in the survey are: relational dilemmas, sexual matters, career and employment necessities; and worship experiences that relate to their age group.

Programs proven to be effective, according to pastors and church leaders are:

1. Mentor Programs

This seems to be one of the most effective ministries, if there are within the community individuals who have recently experienced and survived the difficulties of young adulthood.

2. Inclusion of Young Adult Oriented Contributions

Worship experience should include some degree of expression of young adults. Songs, dance or even Christian rap are available, if feasible for your particular situation.

3. Dialogue on the Issues of the Time.

Seminars on drugs, gangs, sex, depression, and especially transitional dilemmas have proven to be beneficial.

4. Gender Empowerment Activities

There are special needs for each gender.

It is perhaps not wise to encourage separation; yet each gender should have church sponsored time to relate, to support, and to share.

5. Physical Involvement

Young adulthood is usually not a time that one sits and contemplates. Have periodical physical activities; basketball, volleyball games or league participation if possible.

6. Ministries that Assist

Prepare in-house agencies that assist in the time of individual need. Have plans for action if a church member is incarcerated, or plans to deal with the trauma of an unmarried pregnancy

7. Young Adult Christian Education

Keep in mind that one of the most important gifts that the church can offer any member, other than the introduction of the individual to God, is a systematic regimen of religious study of God. Many young Adults resist study, ministries. ENCOURAGE AND INSIST ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION!

### Analysis

Departures from the traditional African American Church by young adults are not new occurrences. Temporary absence for the church is commonplace at this age. Today, mostly due to the availability of the mass media, with its focus on anything and everything negative in the spirit of profit, recent absences have been misunderstood. There are more absences of young-adults, but surveys seem to indicate that declines are apparent across the board in the church.

The presence of gangs, drugs, and decreased occupational opportunities are real and their negative influences are not to be underestimated. History teaches that each previous generation had its crises. Six decades ago the depression

and the "flapper" age confronted the church. Four decades ago, the "threats" from communism and rock and roll music were the nemesis. Two decades ago, free sex and the drug culture were prevalent. Somehow, God found ways to redeem at least a remnant of young adults in each of these eras for God's purposes.

Still, these issues afford an opportunity for the church to stand up and be the "church." All young adults are not lost. All young adults are not anti-church, anti-religion or anti-God. This survey uncovered the fact that there are young Christians who stand on the solid rock and hold on to the faith. Still there are for the church challenges. Other young adults have left the parameters of the church. In reality, some African American young adults have been or are being overlooked by both the church and existing society

There is now a crisis in the African American Church fueled by a trend of young adult absence. Unless there are measures for resistance to this trend, in the future there will be in the absences in all age groups. Religious tradition, and the strength of the church is in jeopardy.

The title of the project is the "Prevention and Reclamation of Young Adults by the African American Church." This survey finds that, at least in the surveyed churches,

there exists an abundance of preservation and a scarcity of reclamation (if reclamation is defined as retrieving what is out of the church) of young adults. Most church leaders interviewed are focusing on retaining and nurturing those within the flock. Their focal point is the potential "lost" young adult in the "house." With such emphasis on this group, what happens to the "prodigal", or to those who never belonged?

Opinions given and actions undertaken provide wise answers to this question. There is a consensus among those church leaders interviewed. The major concern for the African American Church in regard to young adults at the present time is to service in-house constituents to the best of the church's ability. Church leaders realize that if the church performs its duties properly with its young adult population, a dual purpose will be the result. There will develop an insulation of concern, love, discipline, and hope that will provide a shield that offers African American young adult church members some measure of protection when and life related problems arise. In addition, well adjusted (in the dictates of God and the church) young adults are the best evangelism vehicles that the church can offer to individuals of this age group that are out of the church.

## APPENDIX A

## Glossary

African American

These are individuals who are either legal residents or reside in the United States and have traceable roots to Africa. In most instances they are the descendants of Africans who were transported to the New World as slaves. Yet, at the present, Africans now migrate to the United States in the same manner as other ethnic groups. Names given to this group in the past were "Colored," "Negro," and "Afro-American." It must be noted that perhaps the label "African American" itself is in error because realistically speaking, any individual of African descent who lives in the "Americas," (synonymous with the New World) could accurately be labeled "African American." For example, in reality, the term "African American" has become associated solely with those individuals who are descendants of African slaves residing in the United States.

African American Church

The religious institution in the United States that is controlled and governed by individuals of African descent is referred to as the African American (Black) church. The individuals involved are descendants of slaves brought to



the New World, commencing in 1619 and continuing through the mid-nineteenth century.

The African American Church began because of conditions related to slavery as an "invisible institution," and eventually emerged as a very visible body; it became a center for African Americans in social, political, and economic advancement. Included are: the Methodist denominations (which are comprised of African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal bodies). Baptist ecclesial organizations include: the National Baptist Convention of America, the National Baptist Convention USA, and the Progressive Baptist Convention. African Americans have been part of the Pentecostal denominations as a result of the "Azusa Street Miracle." This event occurred in Los Angeles, California, at the turn of the twentieth century, when a group of inter-racial charismatic Christians fasted, prayed and subsequently were endowed with spiritual gifts such as healing, and glossolalia (speaking in tongues). This movement includes the Church of God in Christ, the Pentecostal, and the Apostolic denominations. Also included in the African American Church are the Church of Christ Holiness and other Black governed religious organizations.

### Young Adult

The age group for this study extends from ages eighteen to thirty. In the fields of psychology and sociology, it is the period that follows adolescence and proceeds mature adulthood. The combination of the words "young" and "adult" connotes *immature* adulthood.

### Theological Affinity

The word "theological" is loosely defined as relating to theology (the study of God) combined with "affinity," which implies a relationship, an attraction, or a connection that translates to a relationship, or connection to or with God, or Godliness. Perhaps the most definitive explanation is that it creates an aura of correlation with the dogma/doctrine of the Christian religion.

### Crisis

The pragmatic explanation for the use of the word "crisis" in this project is simply an unstable time or unstable state of affairs, and/or an emotional event or a radical change of status in an individual's life.

### Confidence

Confidence in relationship to this project reflects a psychological state of mind and a persona that the majority of young adults have and exhibit. It is manifested by an overabundance of self-assurance. The impression is given that "I have the ability to conquer the world." There exists at this time in life the general belief that one has all of life's answers. Developmental experts postulate that such a state is absolutely necessary in order to propel the individual into new learning situations with at least some assurance of success.

### Drop-out

As in secular education, this word/term refers specifically to those individuals who exited the "program" prematurely.

## APPENDIX B

Questionnaire #1  
(Questionnaire for Religious Leaders)

1. What is your position in the church?
  
2. If possible, from your membership records provide the number of young adult (18-30) that attended in the years below
 

A. 1975	_____
B. 1985	_____
C. 1995	_____
D. Presently	_____
  
3. What programs or ministries do your church offer specifically designed for the young adult age group?
  
4. What measures are your church undertaking to maintain, reclaim or attract young adults?
  
5. Do you feel that your church has suffered a loss in young adult attendance?
 

Yes	_____
No	_____
  
6. If the answer to #5 is yes, has your church considered discussions as to why young adults exit the church?
  
7. What was the result of such discussions?
  
8. Do you feel that with the proliferation of drugs, gangs, and a general decline in occupational opportunities in African American community contributes to the decline of young adult church attendance?

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If your answer is yes, do you have suggestions for combating the issue?

What do you feel is the role of the church?

9. How do you feel the church can be of assistance in the transitional period from adolescence to young adulthood?
10. What changes are must the church can make so that the church can be more appealing and relevant for African American young adults?
11. Do you have a "vision" in relationship to this issue?
12. What do you feel are the negative effects on the church from the increasing absence of young adults?
13. List any other suggestions or comments that you feel are important.

**APPENDIX C****Questionnaire #2  
(Survey for Young Adults Attending  
African American Churches)**

1. What is your age group?  
A. 18-21\_\_\_\_\_ B. 21-25\_\_\_\_\_ C. 25-30\_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you attended church
3. Are you a member of the congregation
4. What is your major reason(s) for attending church?
5. What organizations or activities are you involved with in your church situation?
6. Who or what has had the greatest influence on your religious experience, education and church participation.
7. What persons (family, friends, church family, etc.) have influenced (positively or negatively) your church attendance?
8. Is your home church also the major church of your biological family.

**How many of your family members are members of your church?**

9. What changes would cause you to attend church more often?
10. Do you believe your church encourages young adult participation?

**In what ways?**

**11. What issues does your church dialogue or explore pertinent to the interests and needs of young adults?**

**12. How does your church satisfy you spiritually?**

**13. What are the 3 most important factors that may effect a decline in young adult attendance in the church today.**

**14. Was there ever a time that you did not attend church on a regular basis?**

**If yes, what was the cause?**

**If no, what caused you to stay?**

**What prompted you to return?**

**15. Do you believe that the overall attendance by African American young adults is declining?**

**If your answer is yes, state what you feel are the reasons.**

**16. List the problems that you feel that you experienced in making the transition from adolescence into young adulthood.**

**If you wish you may add your name and any other information or statements.**

## APPENDIX D

## QUESTIONNAIRE #3

(Survey of Young Adults Not Attending Church)

1. What is your age group?

A. 18-21 \_\_\_\_\_ B. 21-25 \_\_\_\_\_ C. 25-30 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you ever attended church on a regular basis (at least 1 or 2 times a month)?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

3. Have you ever been a member of a church?

If yes, how old were you when you joined?

Did you participate in any church organizations? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If your answer is yes, which ones?

4. When was the last time you attended church?

For what reason?

5. What were the major influence that caused you to attend?

6. What was the major reason for your discontinuance?

List other reasons

7. What were you seeking in your church attendance?

8. What kind of worship expression appeals to you?

9. What can the church do to increase your interest and desire to



attend and be a regular participant in church activities?

10. What social factors, if any, do you believe prevent many young from attending or makes attendance difficult?
11. Did you attend church with your parents as a child?
12. Do you have children?
13. Will or do you encourage your children to attend church?
14. If you are a parent, would you be willing to start attending church to set a positive example for your children? Why or why not is this important to you?
15. Are there other comments or suggestions you wish to offer on the issue?
16. List the problems that you feel that you experienced in making the transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

If you choose you may supply your name.

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